

CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP

# What the Buddha Taught

*Original Author*  
Walpola Rahula  
(1907—1997)



## The Dhammapada

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The Path of the Dhamma

*A New Rendering by*  
Allan R. Bomhard



Intermediate Series



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REVISED AND EDITED BY  
Allan R. Bomhard



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# Foreword

By Paul Demiéville

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Here is an exposition of Buddhism conceived in a resolutely modern spirit by one of the most qualified and enlightened representatives of that religion. The Rev. Dr. Walpola Rahula received the traditional training and education of a Buddhist Monk in Ceylon (Śri Lanka) and held eminent positions in one of the leading monastic institutions (Pirivena) in that island, where the *Dhamma* of the *Buddha* has flourished since the time of Asoka and has preserved all its vitality up to this day. Thus brought up in an ancient tradition, he decided, at this time when all traditions are called into question, to face the spirit and the methods of international scientific learning. He entered Ceylon University, obtained a B.A. Honors degree (London), and then earned a Ph.D. from Ceylon University with a highly erudite thesis on the History of Buddhism in Ceylon. Having worked with distinguished professors at the University of Calcutta and come in contact with practitioners of Mahāyāna Buddhism, that form of Buddhism which is found in Tibet, China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam, he decided to delve into the Chinese and Tibetan texts in order to widen his knowledge, and he has honored us by coming to the University of Paris (Sorbonne) to prepare a study of Asaṅga, the illustrious philosopher of Mahāyāna Buddhism, whose principal works in the original Sanskrit are lost and can only now be read in their Tibetan and Chinese translations. Eight years have now passed since Dr. Rahula has been among us, wearing the saffron robe, breathing the air of the West, searching perhaps in our old troubled mirror of universalized reflection of the religion which is his.

The book, which he has kindly asked me to present to the Western reading public, is a luminous account, within the reach of everybody, of the fundamental principles of Buddhist doctrine, as they are found in the most ancient texts, which are called “The Tradition” (*Āgama*) in Sanskrit and “The Canonical Corpus” (*Nikāya*) in Pāli. Dr. Rahula, who possesses an incomparable knowledge of these texts, refers to them constantly and almost exclusively. Their authority is recognized unanimously by all the Buddhist schools, which were and are numerous, but none of which ever deviates from these texts, except with the intention of better interpreting the spirit beyond the letter. The interpretation has indeed been varied in the course of the expansion of Buddhism through many centuries and vast regions, and the *Dhamma* (Sanskrit *Dharma*) has taken on more than one aspect. But, the aspect of Buddhism presented here by Dr. Rahula — humanist, rationalist, Socratic in some respects, Evangelic in others, or, again, almost scientific — has for its support a great deal of authentic scriptural evidence, which he only had to let speak for itself.

The explanations that he adds to his quotations, always translated with scrupulous accuracy, are clear, simple, direct, and free from all pedantry. Some among them might lead to discussion, as when he wishes to rediscover the doctrines of the Mahāyāna School

in the Pāli sources; but, his familiarity with those sources allows him to throw new light on them. He addresses himself to the modern man, but he refrains from insisting on comparisons just suggested here and there, which could be made with certain currents of thought of the contemporary world — socialism, atheism, existentialism, psychoanalysis. It is for the reader to appreciate the modernity, the possibilities of adaptation of a doctrine which, in this work of genuine scholarship, is presented to him in its primal richness. ■



# Author's Preface

All over the world today, there is a growing interest in Buddhism. Numerous societies and study-groups have come into being, and scores of books have appeared on the Teachings of the *Buddha*. It is to be regretted, however, that most of them have been written by those who are not really competent, or who bring to their task misleading assumptions derived from other religions, and who have, consequently, misinterpreted and misrepresented the subject. A professor of comparative religion who recently wrote a book on Buddhism did not even know that Ānanda, the devoted attendant of the *Buddha* was a *Bhikkhu* (a Monk), but thought that he was a lay person! The knowledge of Buddhism propagated by books like these can be left to the reader's imagination.

I have tried to address myself in this little book first of all to the educated and intelligent general reader, uninstructed in the subject, who would like to know what the *Buddha* actually taught. For his benefit, I have aimed at giving briefly, and as directly and simply as possible, a faithful and accurate account of the original Pāli texts of the *Tipiṭika*, universally accepted by scholars as the earliest extant records of the Teachings of the *Buddha*. The material used and the passages quoted here are taken directly from these original sources. In a few places, I have referred to some later works too.

I have borne in mind, too, the reader who already has some knowledge of what the *Buddha* taught and who would like to go further with his studies. I have, therefore, provided not only the Pāli equivalents of most of the key words, but also references to the original texts in footnotes.

The difficulties of my task have been manifold; throughout, I have tried to steer a course between the unfamiliar and the popular, to give the English reader of the present day something which he can understand and appreciate, without sacrificing anything of the subject matter and the form of the discourses of the *Buddha*. Writing the book, I have had the ancient texts running through my mind; so I have deliberately kept the synonyms and repetitions which were a part of the *Buddha's* speech as it has come down to us through oral tradition, in order that the reader should have some notion of the form used by the Teacher. I have kept as close as I could to the originals and have tried to make my translations easy and readable.

But, there is a point beyond which it is difficult to take an idea without losing, in the interests of simplicity, the particular meaning that the *Buddha* was trying to convey. Inasmuch as the title "*What the Buddha Taught*" was selected for this book, I felt that it would be wrong not to set down the words of the *Buddha*, even the figures of speech that he used, in preference to a rendering which might provide the easy gratification of comprehensibility at the risk of distorting the meaning.

In this book, I have discussed almost everything which is commonly accepted as the essential and fundamental Teachings of the *Buddha*. These are the doctrines of: (1) the Four Noble Truths; (2) the Noble Eightfold Path; (3) the Five Aggregates; (4) *kamma* (Sanskrit *karma*); (5) Rebirth; (6) Dependent Arising; (7) the doctrine of No-Soul; (8) the Foundations of Mindfulness; and (9) "Meditation" or Mental Development. Naturally, there will be expressions in the discussion that will be unfamiliar to the Western reader. I would ask him to begin with this book and then to go on to more advanced texts such as

Bhikkhu Bodhi's *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2205]). It would not be possible to write a book on the Teachings of the *Buddha* without dealing with the subjects which Theravādin and Mahāyāna Buddhism have accepted as fundamental in His system of thought.

The term "Theravādin" — "Hīnayāna" or "Lesser Vehicle" is no longer used in informed circles — could be translated as "the School of the Elders" (*thera*), and the term "Mahāyāna" as "the Great Vehicle". They refer to the two main forms of Buddhism practiced in the world today. The Theravādin School, which is regarded as the original orthodox school of Buddhism, is found in Śri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma), the Chittagong region of Bangladesh, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The Mahāyāna School, which developed much later, is found in other Buddhist countries such as Tibet, Mongolia, China, Taiwan, the Russian Federation, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. There are certain differences between these two schools, mainly regarding some beliefs, practices, and observances, but, on the most important Teachings of the *Buddha*, such as those discussed in this book, both schools are in agreement.

It only remains for me now to express my sense of gratitude to Professor F. C. Ludowyk, who has in fact invited me to write this book, for all the help given me, the interest taken in it, the suggestions he offered, and for reading through the manuscript. To Miss Marianne Möhn too, who went through the manuscript and made valuable suggestions, I am deeply grateful. Finally, I am greatly beholden to Professor Paul Demiéville, my teacher in Paris, for his kindness in writing the Foreword. ■

Walpola Rahula  
Paris, July 1958

# 1

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## The Buddha

The *Buddha*, whose personal name was Siddhattha,<sup>1</sup> and family name Gotama,<sup>2</sup> lived in northern India in the 6th century BCE. His father, Suddhodana, was the ruler of the kingdom of the Sākyas (in modern Nepal). His mother was Queen Māyā. According to the custom of the time, He was married quite young, at the age of sixteen, to a beautiful and devoted young princess named Yasodharā. The young prince lived in His palace with every luxury at His command. But all of a sudden, confronted with the realities of life and the suffering of mankind, He decided to find the solution — the way out of this universal suffering.

At the age of 29, soon after the birth of His only child, Rāhula, He left His kingdom and became an ascetic in search of a solution to the problem of suffering. For six years, the ascetic Gotama wandered about the valley of the Ganges, meeting famous religious teachers, studying and following their systems and methods, and submitting Himself to rigorous ascetic practices. They did not satisfy Him. So He abandoned all traditional religions and their methods and went His own way.

It was thus that one evening, seated under a tree (since then known as the *Bodhi*-tree or *Bo*-tree, the “Tree of Wisdom”), on the bank of the river Nerañjarā at Bodhgaya (near Gaya in modern Bihar), at the age of 35, Gotama attained Enlightenment, after which He was known as “The *Buddha*”, “The Enlightened One”.

After His Enlightenment, Gotama the *Buddha* delivered His first discourse to a group of five ascetics, His old colleagues, in the Deer Park at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Varanasi<sup>3</sup> (Benares). From that day, for 45 years, He taught all classes of men and women — kings and peasants, Brahmins and outcasts, bankers and beggars, holy men and robbers — without making the slightest distinction between them. He recognized no differences of caste or social groupings, and the Way He preached was open to all men and women who were ready to understand and follow it.

At the age of 80, the *Buddha* passed away at Kusinārā (in modern Uttar Pradesh in India).

Today, Buddhism is found in Śri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Tibet, China, Japan, Mongolia, Korea, Laos, Taiwan, in some parts of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, and also in the Russian Federation. The Buddhist population of the world is currently over 500 million people. ■

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<sup>1</sup> “Siddhārtha” in Sanskrit.

<sup>2</sup> “Gautama” in Sanskrit.

<sup>3</sup> Also called “Kāśī” (Sanskrit “Kāśī”).



# 2

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## The Buddhist Attitude of Mind

Among the founders of religions, the *Buddha* (if we are permitted to call Him the “founder of a religion” in the popular sense of the term) was the only teacher who did not claim to be other than a human being, pure and simple. Other teachers were either God, or his incarnations in different forms, or inspired by him. The *Buddha* was not only a human being, He claimed no inspiration from any god or external power whatsoever. He attributed all His realization, attainments, and achievements to human endeavor and human intelligence. A man and only a man can become a *Buddha*. Every man has within himself the potentiality of becoming a *Buddha*, if he so wills it and endeavors. We can call the *Buddha* a “man *par excellence*”. He was so perfect in His “humanness” that He came to be regarded later in popular religion almost as “superhuman”.

Man’s position, according to Buddhism, is supreme. Man is his own master, and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny.

“You alone are your own refuge; who else could be?”<sup>4</sup> said the *Buddha*. He admonished His followers to “be a refuge to themselves”, and never to seek refuge in or help from anybody else. He taught, encouraged, and stimulated each person to develop himself and to work out his own liberation, for man has the power to liberate himself from all bondage through his own personal effort and intelligence. The *Buddha* says: “You should do your work, for the *Tathāgatas*<sup>5</sup> only teach the way.” If the *Buddha* is to be called a “savior” at all, it is only in the sense that He discovered and showed the Path to Liberation, *nibbāna*. But we must tread the Path ourselves.

It is on this principle of individual responsibility that the *Buddha* allows freedom to His disciples. In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, the *Buddha* says that He never thought of controlling the *Sangha* (Order of Monks and Nuns),<sup>6</sup> nor did He want the *Sangha* to depend on Him. He said that there was no esoteric doctrine in His teaching, nothing hidden in the “closed-fist of the teacher”, or, to put it in other words, there was never anything “up His sleeve”.

The freedom of thought allowed by the *Buddha* is unheard of elsewhere in the history of religions. This freedom is necessary because, according to the *Buddha*, man’s

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<sup>4</sup> *Dhammapada* XII verse 160.

<sup>5</sup> *Tathāgata* literally means “One who has come to the Truth”, that is, “One who has discovered the Truth”. This is the term usually used by the *Buddha* when He referred to Himself and to the *Buddhas* in general.

<sup>6</sup> *Sangha* literally means “community”. But, in Buddhism, this term denotes “the community of Buddhist Monks (*Bhikkhu*) and Nuns (*Bhikkhunī*)”. *Buddha*, *Dhamma* (Teaching), and *Sangha* (Order) are known as “*tiśaraṇa*”, the “Three Refuges”, or “*tiratana*”, the “Three Jewels” or “Triple-Gem”.

liberation depends upon his own realization of Truth, and not on the benevolent grace of a god or any external power as a reward for his obedient good behavior.

The *Buddha* once visited a small town called Kesaputta in the kingdom of Kosala. The inhabitants of this town were known by the common name Kālāma. When they heard that the *Buddha* was in their town, the Kālāmas paid Him a visit, and told Him: “Sir, there are some recluses and *brāhmaṇas* who visit Kesaputta. They explain and promote only their own doctrines, and despise, condemn and spurn others’ doctrines. Then, other recluses and *brāhmaṇas* come, and they, too, in their turn, explain and promote only their own doctrines, and despise, condemn and spurn others’ doctrines. But, for us, Sir, we always have doubt and perplexity as to whom among these venerable recluses and *brāhmaṇas* spoke the truth, and who spoke falsehood.”

Thereupon, the *Buddha* gave them this advice, unique in the history of religions: “Yes, Kālāmas, it is proper that you have doubt, that you have perplexity, for a doubt has arisen in a matter which is doubtful. Now look, you Kālāmas, do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Do not be led by the authority of religious texts, or by the delight in speculative opinions, or by seeming possibilities, or by the idea: ‘this is our teacher.’ But, O Kālāmas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (*akusala*), wrong, and bad, then give them up... And, when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (*kusala*) and good, then accept them and follow them.”<sup>7</sup>

The *Buddha* went even further. He told the *Bhikkhus* that a disciple should examine even the *Tathāgata* (*Buddha*) Himself, so that he (the disciple) might be fully convinced of the true value of the teacher whom he followed.<sup>8</sup>

According to the *Buddha*’s teaching, doubt (*vicikicchā*) is one of the Five Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*)<sup>9</sup> to the clear understanding of Truth and to spiritual progress (or for that matter to any progress). Doubt, however, is not a “sin”, because there are no articles of faith in Buddhism. In fact, there is no “sin” in Buddhism, as sin is understood in some religions. The root of all evil is ignorance (*avijjā*) and false views (*micchā diṭṭhi*). It is an undeniable fact that, as long as there is doubt, perplexity, wavering, no progress is possible. It is also equally undeniable that there must be doubt as long as one does not understand or see clearly. But, in order to progress further, it is absolutely necessary to get rid of doubt. To get rid of doubt, one has to see clearly.

There is no point in saying that one should not doubt or one should believe. Just to say “I believe” does not mean that you understand and see. When a student works on a mathematical problem, he comes to a stage beyond which he does not know how to proceed, and where he is in doubt and perplexity. As long as he has this doubt, he cannot proceed. If he wants to proceed, he must resolve this doubt. And there are ways of resolving this doubt. Just to say “I believe”, or “I do not doubt” will certainly not solve the problem. To force oneself to believe and to accept a thing without understanding is foolish.

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<sup>7</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*.

<sup>8</sup> *Vīmaṇsaka Sutta*, no. 47, of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

<sup>9</sup> The Five Hindrances are: (1) desire for gratification of the senses (*kāmacchanda*); (2) anger, hatred, ill-will (*vyāpāda*); (3) physical and mental sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*); (4) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*); (5) doubt, perplexity, wavering (*vicikicchā*).

The *Buddha* was always eager to dispel doubt. Even just a few minutes before His death, He requested His disciples several times to ask Him if they had any doubts about His teaching and not to feel sorry later that they could not clear those doubts. But the disciples were silent. What He said then was touching: “If it is through respect for the Teacher that you do not ask anything, let even one of you inform his friend” (that is, let one tell his friend so that the latter may ask the question on the other’s behalf).<sup>10</sup>

Not only the freedom of thought, but also the tolerance allowed by the *Buddha* is astonishing to the student of the history of religions. Once in Nālandā, a prominent and wealthy householder named Upāli, a well-known lay disciple of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (Mahāvīra),<sup>11</sup> was expressly sent by Mahāvīra himself to meet the *Buddha* and defeat Him in argument on certain points in the theory of *kamma*, because the *Buddha*’s view on the subject were different from those of Mahāvīra. Quite contrary to expectations, Upāli, at the end of the discussion, was convinced that the views of the *Buddha* were right and those of his master were wrong. So he begged the *Buddha* to accept him as one of His lay disciples (*Upāsaka*). But the *Buddha* asked him to reconsider it, and not to be in a hurry, for “considering carefully is good for well-known men like you”. When Upāli expressed his desire again, the *Buddha* requested him to continue to respect and support his old religious teachers as he used to.<sup>12</sup>

In the third century BCE, the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka of India, following this noble example of tolerance and understanding, honored and supported all other religions in his vast empire. In one of his Edicts carved on rock, the original of which one may read even today, the Emperor declared: “One should not honor only one’s own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honor others’ religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps one’s own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise, one digs the grave of one’s own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honors his own religion and condemns other religions, does so, indeed, through devotion to his own religion, thinking ‘I will glorify my own religion’. But, on the contrary, in so doing, he injures his own religion more gravely. So concord is good. Let all listen and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.”<sup>13</sup>

We should add here that this spirit of sympathetic understanding should be applied today not only in the matter of religious doctrine, but elsewhere as well.

This spirit of tolerance and understanding has been, from the beginning, one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization. That is why there is not a single example of persecution or the shedding of a drop of blood in converting people to Buddhism or in its propagation during its long history of 2600 years. It spread peacefully all over the continent of Asia, having more than 500 million adherents today. Violence in any form, under any pretext whatsoever, is absolutely contrary to the Teaching of the *Buddha*.

<sup>10</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya; Anguttara Nikāya.*

<sup>11</sup> Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (Mahāvīra) was the founder of Jainism. He was a contemporary of the *Buddha* and probably a few years older.

<sup>12</sup> Upāli Sutta, no. 56, of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

<sup>13</sup> Rock Edict, XII.

The question has often been asked: Is Buddhism a religion or a philosophy? It does not matter what you call it. Buddhism remains what it is whatever label you may put on it. The label is immaterial. Even the label “Buddhism” which we give to the Teaching of the *Buddha* is of little importance. The name one gives it is inessential.

In the same way, Truth needs no label: it is neither Buddhist, nor Christian, nor Jewish, nor Hindu, nor Moslem. It is not the monopoly of anyone. Sectarian labels are a barrier to the independent understanding of Truth, and they produce harmful prejudices in men’s mind.

This is true not only in intellectual and spiritual matters, but also in human relations. When, for instance, we meet a man, we do not look on him as a human being, but we put a label on him, such as English, French, German, American, or Latino, and regard him with all the prejudices associated with that label in our mind. Yet, he may be completely free from those attributes which we have put on him.

People are so fond of discriminative labels that they even go to the length of putting them on human qualities and emotions common to all. So, they talk of different “brands” of charity, as for example, of Buddhist charity or Christian charity, and look down upon other “brands” of charity. But charity cannot be sectarian; it is neither Buddhist, nor Christian, nor Hindu, nor Moslem. The love of a mother for her child is neither Buddhist nor Christian — it is motherly love. Human qualities and emotions such as love, charity, compassion, tolerance, patience, friendship, desire, hatred, ill-will, ignorance, conceit, etc., need no sectarian labels; they belong to no particular religion.

To the seeker after Truth, it is immaterial where an idea comes from. The source and development of an idea is a matter for the academic. In fact, in order to understand Truth, it is not necessary even to know whether the teaching comes from the *Buddha*, or from anyone else. What is essential is seeing the thing, understanding it. There is an important story in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (*sutta* no.140) which illustrates this.

The *Buddha* once spent a night in a potter’s shed.<sup>14</sup> There was a young recluse in the same shed who had arrived earlier. They did not know each other. The *Buddha* observed the recluse, and thought to Himself: “Pleasant are the ways of this young man. It would be good if I should ask about him.” So the *Buddha* asked him: “O *Bhikkhu*,<sup>15</sup> in whose name have you left home? Who is your master? Whose doctrine do you follow?”

“O friend,” answered the young man, “there is the recluse Gotama, a Sākyan scion, who left the Sākyan family to become a recluse. There is high repute abroad of Him that He is an *Arahant*, a Fully-Enlightened One. He is my Master, and I follow His doctrine.”

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<sup>14</sup> In ancient India, potters’ sheds were spacious and quiet. References are made in the Pāli texts to ascetics and recluses, as well as to the *Buddha* Himself, spending a night in a potter’s shed during their wanderings.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that the *Buddha* addresses this recluse as “*Bhikkhu*”, a term used for Buddhist Monks. In what follows, it will be seen that Pukkusāti was not a *Bhikkhu*, not a member of the Order of the *Sangha*, for he asked the *Buddha* to admit him into the Order. Perhaps, in the days of the *Buddha*, the term “*Bhikkhu*” was used at times for other ascetics indiscriminately, or the *Buddha* was not very strict in the use of the term. “*Bhikkhu*” means “mendicant”, “one who begs for food”, and perhaps it was used here in its literal and original sense. But today, the term “*Bhikkhu*” is used only for Buddhist Monks, especially in Theravādin countries like Śri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia as well as the Chittagong region of Bangladesh.



“Where does the Blessed One, the *Arahant*, the Fully-Enlightened One live at the present time?”

“In the countries to the north, friend, there is a city called Sāvattthī. It is there that that Blessed One, the *Arahant*, the Fully-Enlightened One is living now.”

“Have you ever seen Him, the Blessed One? Would you recognize Him if you saw Him?”

“I have never seen the Blessed One. Nor should I recognize Him if I saw Him.” The *Buddha* realized that it was in His name that this unknown young man had left home and become a recluse. But, without divulging His own identity, He said: “O *Bhikkhu*, I will teach you the doctrine. Listen and pay attention. I will speak.”

“Very well, friend,” said the young man in assent.

Then, the *Buddha* delivered a most remarkable discourse to this young man, explaining Truth (the gist of which is given later in the chapter dealing with the third Noble Truth).

It was only at the end of the discourse that this young recluse, whose name was Pukkusāti, realized that the person who spoke to him was the *Buddha* Himself. So he got up, went before the *Buddha*, bowed down at feet of the Master, and apologized to Him for calling Him “friend”<sup>16</sup> unknowingly. He then begged the *Buddha* to ordain him and admit him into the Order of the *Sangha*.

The *Buddha* asked him whether he had the alms-bowl and the robes ready. (A *Bhikkhu* must have three robes and alms-bowl for begging food.) When Pukkusāti replied in the negative, the *Buddha* said that the *Tathāgatas* would not ordain a person unless the alms-bowl and robes are ready. So Pukkusāti went out in search of an alms-bowl and robes, but was unfortunately mauled by a cow and died.<sup>17</sup> Later, when this sad news reached the *Buddha*, He announced that Pukkusāti was a wise man, who had already seen the Truth, and attained the penultimate stage in the realization of *nibbāna*, and that he was born in a realm where he would become an *Arahant*<sup>18</sup> and finally pass away, never to return to this world again.

From this story, it is quite clear that, when Pukkusāti listened to the *Buddha* and understood His teaching, he did not know who was speaking to him, or whose teaching it

<sup>16</sup> The Pāli term used is “*āvuso*”, which means “friend”. It is a respectful term of address among equals. But disciples never used this term in addressing the *Buddha*. Instead, they used the term “*bhante*”, which approximately means “Sir” or “Lord”. At the time of the *Buddha*, the members of His Order of Monks (*Sangha*) addressed one another as “*āvuso*”, “friend”. But, before His death, the *Buddha* instructed younger Monks to address their elders as “*bhante*”, “Sir”, or “*āyasmā*”, “Venerable”. But elders should address younger members of the Order either by name or as “*āvuso*”, “friend”. This practice has continued to the present day in the *Sangha*.

<sup>17</sup> It is well-known that cows roam about the streets in India. From this reference, it seems that the tradition is very old. But, in general, these cows are docile and not savage or dangerous.

<sup>18</sup> An *Arahant* is a person who has liberated himself from all defilements and imperfections such as desire, hatred, ill-will, ignorance, pride, conceit, etc. He has attained the fourth or the highest and ultimate stage in the realization of *nibbāna* and is full of wisdom (*paññā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and other pure and noble qualities. At that time, Pukkusāti had attained only the third stage, which is technically called “*Anāgāmi*”, “Non-Returner”. The second stage is called “*Sakadāgāmi*”, “Once-Returner”, while the first stage is called “*Sotāpanna*”, “Stream-Enterer” or “Stream-Winner”.

was. He saw Truth. If the medicine is good, the disease will be cured. It is not necessary to know who prepared it or where it came from.

Almost all religions are built on faith — rather, “blind” faith it would seem. But, in Buddhism, emphasis is laid on “seeing”, knowing, understanding, and not on faith, or belief. In Buddhist texts, there is a word *saddhā* (Sanskrit *śraddhā*), which is usually translated as “faith” or “belief”. But *saddhā* is not “faith” in the usual sense, but rather “confidence” borne out of conviction. In popular Buddhism and also in ordinary usage in the texts, the word *saddhā*, it must be admitted, has an element of “faith” in the sense that it signifies devotion to the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma* (Teaching), and the *Sangha* (The Order of Monks and Nuns).

According to Asaṅga, the great Buddhist philosopher of the 4th century CE, *śraddhā* has three aspects: (1) full and firm conviction that a thing is; (2) serene joy at good qualities; and (3) aspiration or wish to achieve an objective or goal.

However you put it, faith or belief as understood by most religions has little to do with Buddhism.

The question of belief arises when there is no understanding — “seeing” in every sense of the word. The moment you see, the question of belief disappears. If I tell you that I have a gem hidden in the folded palm of my hand, the question of faith arises because you do not see it yourself. But, if I unclench my fist and show you the gem, then you see it for yourself, and the question of faith does not arise. So the phrase in ancient Buddhist texts reads: “Realizing, as one sees a gem in the palm.”

A disciple of the *Buddha* named Muṣīla tells another monk: “Friend Savitṭha, without devotion, faith, or belief,<sup>19</sup> without liking or inclination, without hearsay or tradition, without considering apparent reasons, without delight in the speculations of opinions, I know and see that the cessation of becoming is *nibbāna*.”<sup>20</sup>

And the *Buddha* says: “O *Bhikkhus*, I say that the destruction of defilements and impurities is [meant] for a person who knows and who sees, and not for a person who does not know and does not see.”<sup>21</sup>

It is always a question of knowing and seeing, and not that of believing. The Teaching of the *Buddha* is qualified as “*ehi-passika*”, inviting you to “come and see”, but not to “come and believe”.

The expressions used everywhere in Buddhist texts referring to persons who have realized Truth are: “The dustless and stainless Eye of Truth (*dhamma-cakkhu*) has arisen.” “He has seen Truth, has attained Truth, has known Truth, has penetrated into Truth, has crossed over doubt, is without wavering.” “Thus, with right wisdom, he sees it as it is (*yathā bhūtaṃ*).”<sup>22</sup> With reference to His own Enlightenment, the *Buddha* said: “The eye was born, knowledge was born, wisdom was born, science was born, light was born.”<sup>23</sup> It is always a question of seeing through knowledge or wisdom (*ñāṇa-dassana*), and not believing through faith.

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<sup>19</sup> Here, the word *saddhā* is used in its ordinary popular sense of “devotion, faith, belief”.

<sup>20</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II.

<sup>21</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.

<sup>22</sup> For example, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III and V; *Majjhima Nikāya* III.

<sup>23</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V.

This was more and more appreciated at a time when Brāhmaṇic orthodoxy insisted on believing and accepting their tradition and authority as the only Truth without question. Once, a group of learned and well-known Brahmins went to see the *Buddha* and had a long discussion with him. One member of the group, a Brahmin youth of 16 years age, named Kāpaṭhika, considered by them all to have an exceptionally brilliant mind, put a question to the *Buddha*.<sup>24</sup>

“Venerable Gotama, there are the ancient holy scriptures of the Brahmins, handed down along the line by unbroken oral tradition of texts. With regard to them, Brahmins come to the absolute conclusion: ‘This alone is Truth, and everything else is false.’ Now, what does the Venerable Gotama say about this?”

The *Buddha* inquired: “Among Brahmins is there any one single Brahmin who claims that he personally knows and sees that ‘This alone is Truth, and everything else is false’?”

The young man was frank, and said: “No.”

“Then, is there any one single teacher, or a teacher of teachers of Brahmins back to the seventh generation, or even any one of those original authors of those scriptures, who claims that he knows and he sees: ‘This alone is Truth, and everything else is false’?”

“No.”

“Then, it is like a line of blind men, each holding on to the preceding one; the first one does not see, the middle one also does not see, the last one also does not see. Thus, it seems to me that the state of the Brahmins is like that of a line of blind men.”

Then, the *Buddha* gave advice of extreme importance to the group of Brahmins: “It is not proper for a wise man who maintains [literally, “protects”] truth to come to the conclusion: ‘This alone is Truth, and everything else is false’.”

Asked by the young Brahmin to explain the idea of maintaining or protecting truth, the *Buddha* said: “A man has a faith. If he says, ‘This is my faith’, so far he maintains truth. But by that, he cannot proceed to the absolute conclusion: ‘This alone is Truth, and everything else is false’.” In other words, a man may believe what he likes, and he may say “I believe this.” So far, he respects the truth. But because of his belief or faith, he should not say that what he believes is alone the Truth, and everything else is false.

The *Buddha* says: “To be attached to one thing [to a certain view] and to look down upon other things (views) as inferior — this, the wise men call a ‘fetter’.”<sup>25</sup>

Once, the *Buddha* explained the doctrine of cause and effect to His disciples,<sup>26</sup> and they said that they saw it and understood it clearly. Then, the *Buddha* said: “O *Bhikkhus*, even this view, which is so pure and so clear, if you cling to it, if you are fond of it, if you treasure it, if you are attached to it, then, you do not understand that the Teaching is similar to a raft, which is for crossing over, and not for getting hold of.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cankī Sutta, no. 95, of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

<sup>25</sup> *Sutta Nipāta*, verse 798.

<sup>26</sup> In the Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta, no. 38, of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

<sup>27</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

Elsewhere, the *Buddha* explains this famous simile in which His Teaching is compared to a raft for crossing over, and not for getting hold of and carrying on one's back:

“O *Bhikkhus*, a man is on a journey. He comes to a vast stretch of water. On this side, the shore is dangerous, but on the other side, it is safe and without danger. No boat goes to the other shore, which is safe and without danger, nor is there any bridge for crossing over. He says to himself: ‘This body of water is vast, and the shore on this side is full of danger; but, on the other shore, it is safe and without danger. No boat goes to the other side, nor is there a bridge for crossing over. It would be good, therefore, if I would gather grass, wood, branches, and leaves to make a raft, and, with the help of the raft, cross over safely to the other side, exerting myself with my hands and feet.’ Then, that man, O *Bhikkhus*, gathers grass, wood, branches, and leaves and makes a raft, and, with the help of that raft, crosses over safely to the other side, exerting himself with his hands and feet. Having crossed over and gotten to the other side, he thinks: ‘This raft was of great help to me. With its aid, I have crossed safely over to this side, exerting myself with my hands and feet. It would be good if I carry this raft on my head or on my back wherever I go’.”

“What do you think, O *Bhikkhus*, if he acted in this way, would that man be acting properly with regard to the raft?”

“No, Sir.”

“In which way, then, would he be acting properly with regard to the raft? Having crossed and gone over to the other side, suppose that man should think: ‘This raft was a great help to me. With its aid, I have crossed safely over to this side, exerting myself with my hands and feet. It would be good if I beached this raft on the shore, or moored it and left it afloat, and then went on my way, wherever it may be.’ Acting in this way, that man would be acting properly with regard to that raft. In the same manner, O *Bhikkhus*, I have taught a doctrine similar to a raft — it is for crossing over, and not for carrying [literally, “getting hold of”]. You, O *Bhikkhus*, who understand that the Teaching is similar to a raft, should give up even good things (*dhamma*); how much more then should you give up evil things (*adhamma*).”<sup>28</sup>

From this parable, it is quite clear that the *Buddha*’s Teaching is meant to carry man to safety, peace, happiness, tranquility — the attainment of *nibbāna*. The whole doctrine taught by the *Buddha* leads to this end. He did not say things just to satisfy intellectual curiosity. He was a practical Teacher and taught only those things which would bring peace and happiness to man.

The *Buddha* was once staying in a *śimsapā* forest in Kosambī (near Allahabad). He took a few leaves into His hand, and asked His disciples: “What do you think, O *Bhikkhus*? Which is more? These few leaves in my hand or the leaves in the forest over there?”

“Sir, very few are the leaves in the hand of the Blessed One, but, indeed, the leaves in the *śimsapā* forest over there are very much more abundant.”

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<sup>28</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I. Here, according to the Commentary, *dhamma* means “high spiritual attainments” as well as “pure views and ideas”. Attachment, even to these, no matter how high and pure they may be, should be given up. How much more, then, should it be with regard to evil and bad things.

“Even so, *Bhikkhus*, of what I have known, I have told you only a little, what I have not told you is very much more. And why have I not told you [those things]? Because that is not useful... does not lead to *nibbāna*. That is why I have not told you those things.”<sup>29</sup>

It is futile, as some scholars vainly try to do, for us to speculate about what the *Buddha* knew but did not tell us.

The *Buddha* was not interested in discussing unnecessary metaphysical questions which are purely speculative and which create imaginary problems. He considered them as a “wilderness of opinions”. It seems that there were some among His own disciples who did not appreciate this attitude of His. For, we have the example of one of them, Mālunkyaputta by name, who put ten well-known classical questions on metaphysical problems to the *Buddha* and demanded answers.<sup>30</sup>

One day, Mālunkyaputta got up from his afternoon meditation, went to the *Buddha*, saluted him, sat on one side and said:

“Sir, when I was alone meditating, this thought occurred to me: There are these problems unexplained, put aside and rejected by the Blessed One, namely, (1) is the universe eternal, or (2) is it not eternal; (3) is the universe finite, or (4) is it infinite; (5) is soul the same as body, or (6) is soul one thing and body another thing; (7) does the *Tathāgata* exist after death, or (8) does He not exist after death; or (9) does He both [at the same time] exist and not exist after death, or (10) does He both [at the same time] not exist and not not-exist? These problems, the Blessed One does not explain to me. This [attitude] does not please me; I do not appreciate it. I will go to the Blessed One and ask Him about this matter. If the Blessed One explains them to me, then I will continue to follow the holy life under Him. If He does not explain them, I will leave the Order and go away. If the Blessed One knows that the universe is eternal, let Him explain it to me so. If the Blessed One knows that the universe is not eternal, let Him say so. If the Blessed One does not know whether the universe is eternal or not, etc., then, for a person who does not know, it is proper to say, ‘I do not know, I do not see’.”

The *Buddha*’s reply to Mālunkyaputta should be a lesson to the many millions of people in the world today who are wasting valuable time on such metaphysical questions and unnecessarily disturbing their peace of mind:

“Did I ever tell you, Mālunkyaputta, ‘Come, Mālunkyaputta, lead the holy life under me, and I will explain these questions to you’?”

“No, Sir.”

“Then, Mālunkyaputta, even you, did you tell Me: ‘Sir, I will lead the holy life under the Blessed One, and the Blessed One will explain these questions to me’?”

“No, Sir.”

“Even now, Mālunkyaputta, I do not tell you: ‘Come and lead the holy life under Me, and I will explain these questions to you.’ And you do not tell me either: ‘Sir, I will lead the holy life under the Blessed One, and He will explain these questions to me’. Under these circumstances, you foolish one, who refuses whom?”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V.

<sup>30</sup> Cūḷa-Mālunkya Sutta, no. 63, of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

<sup>31</sup> That is, both are free, and neither is under obligation to the other.

“Mālunkyaputta, if anyone says: ‘I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until He explains these questions,’ he may die with these questions unanswered by the *Tathāgata*. Suppose Mālunkyaputta, a man is wounded by a poisoned arrow, and his friends and relatives bring him to a surgeon. Suppose the man should then say: ‘I will not let this arrow be taken out until I know who shot me; whether the person who shot me is a *khattiya* [the warrior caste], a *brāhmaṇa* [the priestly caste], a *vessa* [the merchant and agricultural caste], or a *sudda* [the low caste]; what his name and family may be; whether he is tall, short, or of medium stature; whether his complexion is black, brown, or golden; from which village, town, or city he comes. I will not let this arrow be taken out until I know the kind of bow with which I was shot; the kind of bowstring used; the type of arrow; what sort of feather was used on the arrow; and with what kind of material the point of the arrow was made.’ Mālunkyaputta, that man would die without knowing any of these things. Even so, Mālunkyaputta, if anyone says: ‘I will not follow the holy life under the Blessed One until He answers these questions, such as whether the universe is eternal or not, etc.,’ he would die with these questions unanswered by the *Tathāgata*.”

Then, the *Buddha* explained to Mālunkyaputta that the holy life does not depend on these views. Whatever opinion one may have about these problems, there is birth, old age, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, distress, “the Cessation of which [that is, *nibbāna*] I declare in this very life.”

“Therefore, Mālunkyaputta, bear in mind what I have explained as explained and what I have not explained as unexplained. What are the things that I have not explained? Whether the universe is eternal or not, etc., [those ten opinions] I have not explained. Why, Mālunkyaputta, have not explained them? Because they are not useful, they are not fundamentally connected with the spiritual holy life, they are not conducive to aversion, detachment, cessation, tranquility, deep penetration, full realization — *nibbāna*. That is why I have not told you about them. Then, what, Mālunkyaputta, have I explained? I have explained suffering (*dukkha*), the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering.<sup>32</sup> Why, Mālunkyaputta, have I explained them? Because they are useful, they are fundamentally connected with the spiritual holy life, they are conducive to aversion, detachment, cessation, tranquility, deep penetration, full realization — *nibbāna*. Therefore, I have explained them.”<sup>33</sup>

Let us now examine the Four Noble Truths which the *Buddha* told Mālunkyaputta He had explained. ■

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<sup>32</sup> These Four Noble Truths are explained in the next four chapters.

<sup>33</sup> It seems that this advice of the *Buddha* had the desired effect on Mālunkyaputta, because elsewhere he is reported to have approached the *Buddha* again for instruction, following which he became an *Arahant* (*Anguttara Nikāya*; *Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV).

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## The First Noble Truth

### Introduction

The heart of the *Buddha's* Teaching lies in the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*), which He expounded in His very first discourse<sup>34</sup> to His old colleagues, the five ascetics, at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Vanarasi (Benares, Kashi). In this discourse, as we have it in the original texts, these four Truths are given briefly. But there are innumerable places in the early Buddhist scriptures where they are explained again and again, with greater detail and in different ways. If we study the Four Noble Truths with the help of these references and explanations, we get a fairly good and accurate account of the essential Teachings of the *Buddha* according to the original texts.

The Four noble Truths are:

1. *Dukkha*<sup>35</sup>
2. *Samudaya*, the arising or origin of *dukkha*
3. *Nirodha*, the cessation of *dukkha*
4. *Magga*, the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*

### Dukkha

The First Noble Truth (*Dukkha-Ariyasacca*) is generally translated by almost all scholars as “The Noble Truth of Suffering”, and it is interpreted to mean that life, according to Buddhism, is nothing but suffering and pain. Both translation and interpretation are highly unsatisfactory and misleading. It is because of this limited, free and easy translation, and its superficial interpretation, that many people have been misled into regarding Buddhism as pessimistic.

First of all, Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. If anything at all, it is realistic, for it takes a realistic view of life and of the world. It looks at things objectively (*yathābhūtam*). It does not falsely lull you into living in a fool's paradise, nor does it frighten and agonize you with all kinds of imaginary fears and sins. It tells you exactly and objectively what you are and what the world around you is, and it shows you the way to perfect freedom, peace, tranquility, and happiness.

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<sup>34</sup> Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (“Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth”), *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V.

<sup>35</sup> No English equivalent is given for this term for reasons stated below.

One physician may gravely exaggerate an illness and give up hope altogether. Another may ignorantly declare that there is no illness and that no treatment is necessary, thus deceiving the patient with false consolation. You may call the first one pessimistic and the second optimistic. Both are equally dangerous. But a third physician diagnoses the symptoms correctly, understands the cause and the nature of the illness, sees clearly that it can be cured, and courageously administers a course of treatment, thus saving the patient. The *Buddha* is like the last physician. He is the wise and scientific doctor for the ills of the world (*bhisakka* or *bhaiṣajya-guru*).

It is true that the Pāli word *dukkha* (Sanskrit *duḥkha*) in ordinary usage means “suffering”, “pain”, “sorrow”, or “misery”, as opposed to the word *sukha*, which means “happiness”, “comfort”, or “ease”. But the term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, which represents the *Buddha*’s view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses. It is admitted that the term *dukkha* in the First Noble Truth contains, quite obviously, the ordinary meaning of “suffering”, but in addition, it also includes deeper ideas such as “unsatisfactoriness”, “imperfection”, “impermanence”, “emptiness”, “insubstantiality”. It is difficult, therefore, to find one English word that encompasses the whole range of concepts represented by the Pāli term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, and so, it is better to leave it untranslated than to give an inadequate and wrong idea of it by conveniently translating it as “suffering” or “pain”.

The *Buddha* does not deny happiness in life when He says that there is suffering. On the contrary, He admits different forms of happiness, both material and spiritual, for lay people, as well as for Monks and Nuns. In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, one of the five original Collections in the Pāli language containing the *Buddha*’s discourses, there is a list of happinesses (*sukhāni*), such as the happiness of family life and the happiness of the life of a recluse, the happiness of sense pleasures and the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of attachment and the happiness of detachment, physical happiness and mental happiness, etc. But all these are included in *dukkha*. Even the very pure spiritual states of *jhāna* (“absorption”) attained by the practice of higher meditation, free from even a shadow of suffering in the accepted sense of the word, states which may be described as unmixed happiness, as well as the state of *jhāna* that is free from sensations both pleasant (*sukha*) and unpleasant (*dukkha*) and is only pure equanimity and awareness — even these very high spiritual states are included in *dukkha*. In one of the *suttas* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (again, one of the five original Collections), after praising the spiritual happiness of these *jhānas*, the *Buddha* says that they are “impermanent, *dukkha*, and subject to change” (*aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhamma*).<sup>36</sup> Notice that the word “*dukkha*” is explicitly used. It is *dukkha*, not because there is “suffering” in the ordinary sense of the word, but because “whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*” (*yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkham*).

The *Buddha* was realistic and objective. He says, with regard to life and the enjoyment of sense pleasures, that one should clearly understand three things: (1) attraction or enjoyment (*assāda*); (2) evil consequence, or danger, or unsatisfactoriness (*ādīnava*); and (3) freedom or liberation (*nissaraṇa*).<sup>37</sup> When you see a pleasant,

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<sup>36</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*.

<sup>37</sup> Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta, *Majjhima Nikāya* I.



charming, and beautiful person, you like him (or her), you are attracted, you enjoy seeing that person again and again — you derive pleasure and satisfaction from seeing and being with that person. This is enjoyment (*assāda*). It is a fact of experience. But this enjoyment is not permanent, just as that person and his or her attractions are not permanent either. When the situation changes, when you cannot see that person, when you are deprived of this enjoyment, you become sad, you may become unreasonable and unbalanced, and you may even behave foolishly. This is the evil, unsatisfactory, and dangerous side of the picture (*ādīnava*). This, too, is a fact of experience. Now, if you have no attachment to the person, if you are completely detached, that is freedom, liberation (*nissaraṇa*). These three things are true with regard to all enjoyment in life.

From this, it is evident that it is not a question of pessimism or optimism, but that we must take account of the pleasures of life as well as of its pains and sorrows, and also of freedom from them, in order to understand life completely and objectively. Only then is true liberation possible. Regarding this question, the *Buddha* says:

“O *Bhikkhus*, if any recluses or *brāhmaṇas* do not understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation, then, it is not possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire for sense pleasures completely, or that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, or that the person who follows their instruction will completely understand the desire for sense pleasures. But, O *Bhikkhus*, if any recluses or *brāhmaṇas* do understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation, then, it is possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire for sense pleasures completely, and that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, and that the person who follows their instruction will completely understand the desire of sense pleasures.”<sup>38</sup>

The conception of *dukkha* may be viewed from three aspects: (1) *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*); (2) *dukkha* as produced by change (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*); and (3) *dukkha* as conditioned states (*saṃkhāra-dukkha*).<sup>39</sup>

All kinds of suffering in life like birth, old age, sickness, death, association with unpleasant persons and conditions, separation from loved ones and pleasant conditions, not getting what one wants, grief, lamentation, distress — all such forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as suffering or pain, are included in *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*).

A happy feeling, a happy condition in life, is not permanent, not everlasting. It changes sooner or later. When it changes, it produces pain, suffering, unhappiness. This vicissitude is included in *dukkha* as suffering produced by change (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*).

It is easy to understand the two forms of suffering (*dukkha*) mentioned above. No one will dispute them. This aspect of the First Noble Truth is more popularly known because it is easy to understand. It is common experience in our daily life.

<sup>38</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>39</sup> *Visuddhimagga*; *Abhidharma Samuccaya*.

But the third form of *dukkha* as conditioned states (*saṃkhāra-dukkha*) is the most important philosophical aspect of the First Noble Truth, and it requires some analytical explanation of what we consider as a “being”, as an “individual”, or as “I”.

According to Buddhist philosophy, what we call a “being”, or an “individual”, or “I”, is only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies, which may be divided into five groups or aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). The *Buddha* says: “In short, these five aggregates of attachment are *dukkha*.”<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, He distinctly defines *dukkha* as the five aggregates: “O *Bhikkhus*, what is *dukkha*? It should be said that it is the five aggregates of attachment.”<sup>41</sup> Here, it should be clearly understood that *dukkha* and the five aggregates are not two different things; the five aggregates themselves are *dukkha*. We will understand this point better when we have some notion of the five aggregates which constitute the so-called “being”. Now, what are these five?

### The Five Aggregates

The first is the Aggregate of Matter (*rūpakkhanda*). In this term, “Aggregate of Matter”, are included the traditional Four Great Elements (*cattāri mahābhūtāni*), namely, (1) solidity, (2) fluidity, (3) heat, and (4) motion, and also the Derivatives (*upādāya-rūpa*) of the Four Great Elements.<sup>42</sup> In the term “Derivatives of Four Great Elements” are included our five material sense organs, that is, the faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and their corresponding objects in the external world, that is, visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects, as well as thoughts, or ideas, or conceptions, which are in the sphere of mind objects (Sanskrit *dharmāyatana*).<sup>43</sup> Thus, the whole realm of matter, both internal and external, is included in the Aggregate of Matter.

The second is the Aggregate of Sensations (*vedanākkhandha*). In this group are included all our sensations, pleasant, or unpleasant, or neutral, experienced through the contact of physical and mental organs with the external world. They are of six kinds: (1) the sensations experienced through the contact of the eye with visible forms; (2) the ear with sounds; (3) the nose with odors; (4) the tongue with tastes; (5) the body with tangible objects; and (6) the mind (which is the sixth faculty in Buddhist Philosophy) with mind objects, or thoughts, or ideas.<sup>44</sup> All our physical and mental sensations are included in this group.

A word about what is meant by the term “Mind” (*manas*) in Buddhist philosophy may be useful here. It should clearly be understood that mind is not spirit as opposed to matter. Buddhism does not recognize a spirit opposed to matter, as accepted by most other systems of philosophies and religions. Mind is only a faculty or organ (*indriya*) like the eye or the ear. It can be controlled and developed like any other faculty, and the *Buddha* speaks quite often of the value of controlling and disciplining these six faculties.

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<sup>40</sup> *Samkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā. Saṃyutta Nikāya V.*

<sup>41</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya III.*

<sup>42</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya III.*

<sup>43</sup> *Abhidharma Samuccaya; Vibhanga; Dhammasaṅgaṇī.*

<sup>44</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya III.*

The difference between the eye and the mind as faculties is that the former senses the world of colors and visible forms, while the latter senses the world of ideas, and thoughts, and mental objects. We experience different fields of the world with different senses. We cannot hear colors, but we can see them. Nor can we see sounds, but we can hear them. Thus, with our five physical sense organs — eye, ear, nose, tongue, body —, we experience only the world of visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects. But these represent only a part of the world, not the whole world. What of ideas and thoughts? They are also a part of the world. But they cannot be sensed, they cannot be conceived by the faculty of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body. Yet, they can be conceived by another faculty, which is mind. Now, ideas and thoughts are not independent of the world experienced by these five physical sense faculties. In fact, they depend on, and are conditioned by, physical experiences. Hence, a person born blind cannot have ideas of color experienced through his other sense faculties. Ideas and thoughts which form a part of the world are thus produced and conditioned by physical experiences and are conceived by the mind. Hence, mind (*manas*) is considered a sense faculty or organ (*indriya*), like the eye or the ear.

The third is the Aggregate of Perceptions (*saññākkhandha*). Like sensations, perceptions also are of six kinds, in relation to six internal faculties and the corresponding six external objects. Like sensations, they are produced through the contact of our six sense faculties with the external world. It is perceptions (*saññā*) that recognize objects, whether physical or mental.<sup>45</sup>

The fourth is the Aggregate of Mental Formations<sup>46</sup> (*saṃkhārakkhandha*). In this group are included all volitional activities both good and bad. What is generally known as *kamma* (Sanskrit *karma*) comes under this group. The *Buddha*'s own definition of *kamma* should be remembered here: “O *Bhikkhus*, it is volition (*cetanā*) that I call *kamma*. Having willed, one acts through body, speech, and mind.”<sup>47</sup> Volition is “mental construction, mental activity. Its function is to direct the mind in the sphere of good, bad, or neutral activities.”<sup>48</sup> Just like sensations (*vedanā*) and perceptions (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*) is of six kinds, connected with the six internal faculties and the corresponding six objects (both physical and mental) in the external world.<sup>49</sup> Sensations and perceptions are not volitional actions. They do not produce karmic effects. It is the only volitional actions — such as attention (*manasikāra*), will (*chanda*), determination (*adhimokkha*), confidence (*saddhā*), concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom (*paññā*), energy (*virīya*), desire (*rāga*), repugnance or hate (*paṭigha*), ignorance (*avijjā*), conceit (*māna*), idea of self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), etc. — that can produce karmic effects. There are fifty-two such mental factors (*cetasika*) which constitute the Aggregate of Mental Formations.

<sup>45</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.

<sup>46</sup> “(Predisposing) Mental Formations” is a term now generally used to represent the wide meaning of the word “*saṃkhāra*” in the list of Five Aggregates. The word *saṃkhāra* in other contexts may mean anything conditioned, anything in the world, in which case, all Five Aggregates are *saṃkhāra*.

<sup>47</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*: *Cetanā'haṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vidāmi. Cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācā manasā.*

<sup>48</sup> *Abhidharma Samuccaya*.

<sup>49</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.

The fifth is the Aggregate of Consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*). Consciousness is a reaction or response which has one of the six sense faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) as its basis, and one of the six corresponding external phenomena (visible form, sound, odor, taste, tangible things, and mind objects, that is, an idea or a thought) as its object. For instance, visual consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*) has the eye as its basis and a visible form as its object. Mental consciousness has the mind as its basis and a mental object, that is, an idea or a thought as its object. So consciousness is connected with other faculties. Thus, like sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and volition (*cetanā*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*) also is of six kinds, in relation to six internal faculties and corresponding six external objects.<sup>50</sup>

It should be clearly understood that consciousness does not recognize an object. It is only a sort of awareness — awareness of the presence of an object. When the eye comes into contact with a color, for instance, blue, visual consciousness arises which simply is awareness of the presence of a color. But, it does not recognize that it is blue. There is no recognition at this stage. It is perception (the third Aggregate mentioned above) that recognizes that it is blue. The term “visual consciousness” is a philosophical expression denoting the same idea as is conveyed by the ordinary word “seeing”. “Seeing” does not mean “recognizing”. Likewise for the other forms of consciousness.

It must be repeated here, that, according to Buddhist philosophy, there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered “Self”, or “Soul”, or “Ego”, as opposed to matter, and that consciousness should not be taken as “spirit” in opposition to matter. This point has to be particularly emphasized, because a wrong notion that consciousness is a sort of Self or Soul that continues as a permanent substance through life has persisted from the earliest time to the present day.

One of the *Buddha*’s own disciples, Sāti by name, held that the Master taught: “It is the same consciousness that transmigrates and wanders about.” The *Buddha* asked him what he meant by “consciousness”. Sāti’s reply is classical: “It is that which expresses, which feels, which experiences the results of good and bad deeds here and there.”

“To whomever, you stupid one”, remonstrated the Master, “have you heard Me expounding the doctrine in this manner? Have I not, in many ways, explained consciousness as arising out of conditions: that there is no arising of consciousness without conditions?” Then, the *Buddha* went on to explain consciousness in detail: “Consciousness is named after whatever condition causes it to arise: on account of eye and visible forms arises a consciousness, and it is called ‘visual consciousness’; on account of ear and sounds arises a consciousness, and it is called ‘auditory consciousness’; on account of nose and odor arises a consciousness, and it is called ‘olfactory consciousness’; on account of tongue and tastes arises a consciousness, and it is called ‘gustatory consciousness’; on account of body and tangible objects arises a consciousness, and it is called ‘tactile consciousness’; on account of the mind and mind objects [that is, ideas and thoughts] arises a consciousness, and it is called ‘mental consciousness’.”

Then, the *Buddha* explained it further by an illustration: A fire is named according to the material on account of which it burns. A fire may burn on account of

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<sup>50</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.

wood, and it is called “wood fire”. It may burn on account of straw, and, then, it is called “straw fire”. In like manner, consciousness is named according to the condition through which it arises.<sup>51</sup>

Dwelling on this point, Buddhaghosa, the great commentator, explains: “... a fire that burns on account of wood burns only when there is a supply, but it dies down in that very place when it [the supply of wood] is no longer there, because, then, the condition has changed, but [the fire] does not cross over to the splinters, etc., and become a splinter fire and so on; even so, the consciousness that arises on account of the eye and visible forms arises in that gate of sense organ [that is, in the eye], only when there is the condition of the eye, visible forms, light, and attention, but it ceases then and there when it [the condition] has changed, but [the consciousness] does not cross over to the ear, etc., and become auditory consciousness and so on...”<sup>52</sup>

The *Buddha* declared in unequivocal terms that consciousness depends on matter (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and mental formations (*samkhāra*), and that it cannot exist independently from them. He says:

“Consciousness may exist having matter as its means, matter as its object, matter as its support, and, seeking delight, it may grow, increase, and develop; or consciousness may exist having sensation as its means... or perception as its means... or mental formations as its means, mental formations as its object, mental formations as its support, and, seeking delight, it may grow, increase, and develop.

“Were a man to say: ‘I shall show the coming, the going, the passing away, the arising, the growth, the increase, or the development of consciousness apart from matter, sensation, perception and mental formations,’ he would be speaking of something that does not exist.”<sup>53</sup>

Very briefly, these are the Five Aggregates. What we call a “being”, or an “individual”, or “I” is only a convenient name or a label given to the combination of these five groups. They are all impermanent, all constantly changing. “Whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*” (*yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkham*). This is the true meaning of the *Buddha*’s words: “In brief, the Five Aggregates of Attachment are *dukkha*.” They are not the same for two consecutive moments. Here, “A” is not equal to “A”. They are always in a flux of momentary arising and disappearing.

“O *brāhmaṇa*, it is just like a mountain river, flowing far and swift, taking everything with it; there is no moment, no instant, no second when it stops flowing, but it goes on flowing and continuing. So, *brāhmaṇa*, is human life like a mountain river.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Mahātaṇhāsarakkhaya Sutta, *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>52</sup> *Majjhima Nikāyaṭṭhakathā*, *Papañcasūdanī* II.

<sup>53</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.

<sup>54</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*. These words are attributed by the *Buddha* to a teacher (*satthā*) named Araka who was free from desires and who lived in the distant past. It is interesting to note here the doctrine of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (around 500 BCE) that everything is in a state of flux, and his famous statement: “You cannot step twice into the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.”

As the *Buddha* told Ratthapāla: “The world is in continuous flux and is impermanent.”

One thing disappears, conditioning the appearance of the next in a series of cause and effect. There is no unchanging substance in them. There is nothing behind them that can be called a permanent “Self” (*ātman*), individuality, or anything that can in reality be called “I”.<sup>55</sup> Everyone will agree that neither matter, nor sensation, nor perception, nor mental formations, nor consciousness can be really called “I”. But, when these five physical and mental aggregates, which are interdependent, are working together in combination as a psychophysical machine,<sup>56</sup> we get the idea of “I”. But this idea of “I” is a false idea, a mental construct, which is nothing other than one of those fifty-two mental factors of the fourth Aggregate which we have just discussed, namely, it is the false idea of self (*sakkhāya-diṭṭhi*).

These five Aggregates together, which we popularly call a “being”, are *dukkha* itself. There is no other “being” or “I” standing behind these five aggregates, who experiences *dukkha*. As Buddhaghosa says:<sup>57</sup>

“Everywhere, in all the realms of existence, the noble disciple sees only mental and corporeal phenomena kept going through the concatenation of causes and effects. No producer of the volitional act, or *kamma*, does he see apart from the deed, no recipient of the *kamma* result (*vipāka*) apart from the result. Moreover, he is well aware that wise men are merely using conventional language, when, with regard to a karmic act, they speak of a doer, or with regard to a *kamma* result, they speak of the recipient of the result.

“No doer of the deeds is found,  
No one who ever reaps their fruits;  
Empty phenomena roll on:  
This alone is the correct view.

“And while the deeds and their results  
Roll on and on, conditioned all,  
There is no first cause to be found,  
Just as it is with seed and tree...

“No god, no *brahmā*, can be called  
The creator of this wheel of life:  
Empty phenomena roll on,  
Dependent upon conditions all.”

There is no unmoving mover behind the movement. It is only movement. It is not correct to say that life is moving; rather, life is movement itself. Life and movement

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<sup>55</sup> The doctrine of *anattā* “No-Self” will be discussed in a later chapter.

<sup>56</sup> In fact, Buddhaghosa compares a “being” to a wooden doll (*dāruyanta*).

<sup>57</sup> *Visuddhimagga*.

are not two different things. In other words, there is no thinker behind the thought; thought itself is the thinker. If you remove the thought, there is no thinker to be found. Here, we cannot fail to notice how this Buddhist view is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian *cogitō ergō sum*: “I think, therefore, I am.”

Now, a question may be raised whether life has a beginning. According to the *Buddha*’s Teaching, the beginning of the life-stream of living beings is unthinkable. The believer in the creation of life by God may be astonished at this reply. But if you were to ask him: “What is the beginning of God?”, he would answer without hesitation: “God has no beginning”, and he is not astonished at his own reply. The *Buddha* says: “O *Bhikkhus*, this cycle of continuity (*samsāra*) is without a visible end, and the first beginning of beings wandering and running round, enveloped in ignorance (*avijjā*) and bound down by the fetters of craving (*taṇhā*) is not to be perceived.”<sup>58</sup> And further, referring to ignorance, which is the main cause of the continuity of life, the *Buddha* states: “The first beginning of ignorance is not to be perceived in such a way as to postulate that there was no ignorance beyond a certain point.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, it is not possible to say that there was no life beyond a certain definite point.

This, in short, is the meaning of the Noble Truth of *Dukkha*. It is extremely important to understand this First Noble Truth clearly, because, as the *Buddha* says, “he who sees *dukkha* sees also the arising of *dukkha*, sees also the cessation of *dukkha*, and sees also the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.”<sup>60</sup>

This does not at all make the life of a Buddhist melancholy or sorrowful, as some people have wrongly imagined. On the contrary, a true Buddhist is the happiest of beings. He has no fears or anxieties. He is always calm and serene and cannot be upset or dismayed by changes or calamities, because he sees things as they are. The *Buddha* was never melancholy or gloomy. He was described by His contemporaries as “ever-smiling” (*mihita-pubbamāgama*). In Buddhist painting and sculpture, the *Buddha* is always represented with a countenance happy, serene, contented, and compassionate. Never a trace of suffering or agony or pain is to be seen. Buddhist art and architecture, as found in Buddhist temples, never give the impression of gloom or sorrow, but produce an atmosphere of calm and serene joy.

Although there is suffering in life, a Buddhist should not be gloomy over it, should not be angry or impatient at it. One of the principal evils in life, according to Buddhism, is “repugnance” or hatred. Repugnance (*paṭigha*) is explained as “ill-will with regard to living beings, with regard to suffering, and with regard to things pertaining to suffering. Its function is to produce a basis for unhappy states and bad conduct.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, it is wrong to be impatient at suffering. Being impatient or angry at suffering does not remove it. On the contrary, it adds a little more to one’s troubles and aggravates and exacerbates a situation that is already disagreeable. What is necessary is not anger or impatience, but the understanding of the question of suffering, how it comes about, and

<sup>58</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II.

<sup>59</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* V.

<sup>60</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V. In fact, the *Buddha* says that he who sees any one of the Four Noble Truths sees the other three as well. These Four Noble Truths are interconnected.

<sup>61</sup> *Abhidharma Samuccaya*.

how to get rid of it, and then to work accordingly with patience, intelligence, determination, and energy.

There are two ancient Buddhist texts called the *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā*, which are full of the joyful utterances of the *Buddha's* disciples, both male and female, who found peace and happiness in life through His Teaching. The king of Kosala once told the *Buddha* that, unlike many a disciple of other religious systems, who looked haggard, coarse, pale, emaciated, and unprepossessing, His disciples were “joyful and elated (*haṭṭha-pahaṭṭha*), jubilant and exultant (*udaggudagga*), enjoying the spiritual life (*abhiratarūpa*), with faculties pleased (*pīṇitindriya*), free from anxiety (*appossukka*), serene (*pannaloma*), peaceful (*paradavutta*), and living with a gazelle's mind (*migabhūtena cetasā*) (that is, light-hearted).” The king added that he believed that this healthy disposition was due to the fact that “these venerable ones had certainly realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One's Teaching.”<sup>62</sup>

Buddhism is quite opposed to the melancholic, sorrowful, penitent, and gloomy attitude of mind, which is considered a hindrance to the realization of Truth. On the other hand, it is interesting to remember here that joy is one of the seven *bojjhangas* or “Factors of Enlightenment”, the essential qualities to be cultivated for the realization of *nibbāna*. ■

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<sup>62</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* II.



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## The Second Noble Truth

The Second Noble Truth is that of the arising or origin of *dukkha* (*Dukkha-samudaya-Ariyasacca*). The most popular and well-known definition of the Second Noble Truth, as found in innumerable places in the original texts, runs as follows:

“It is this ‘craving’ (‘thirst’, *taṇhā*) which produces re-existence and re-becoming (*ponobhavikā*), and which is bound up with passionate greed (*nandīrāga-sahagatā*), and which finds fresh delight now here now there (*tatratatrā-bhinandinī*), namely: (1) craving for sense pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*); (2) craving for existence and becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*); and (3) craving for non-existence [self-annihilation] (*vibhava-taṇhā*).”<sup>63</sup>

It is this craving, desire, greed, “thirst”, manifesting itself in various ways, that gives rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings. But it should not be taken as the first cause, for there is no first cause possible, since, according to Buddhism, everything is relative and interdependent. Even this craving (*taṇhā*), which is considered as the cause or origin of *dukkha*, depends for its arising (*samudaya*) on something else, which is sensation (*vedanā*),<sup>64</sup> and sensation arises depending on contact (*phassa*), and so on and so forth continues on the circle which is known as “Conditioned Genesis” or “Dependent Arising” (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), which we will discuss later.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, craving (*taṇhā*) is not the first or the only cause of the arising of *dukkha*. But it is the most palpable and immediate cause, the “principal thing” and the “all-pervading thing”.<sup>66</sup> Hence, in certain places in the original Pāli texts themselves, the definition of *samudaya*, or the origin of *dukkha*, includes other defilements and impurities (*kilesa*, *sāsavā dhammā*), in addition to craving (*taṇhā*), which is always given the first place.<sup>67</sup> Within the necessarily limited space of our discussion, it will be sufficient if we remember that this craving has as its center the false idea of Self arising out of ignorance (*avijjā*).

Here, the term “craving” (*taṇhā*) includes not only desire for, and attachment to, sense pleasures, wealth, and power, but also desire for, and attachment to, ideas and

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<sup>63</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Mahāvagga; *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V.

<sup>64</sup> *Vedanāsamudayā taṇhāsamudayo*. *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Abhidharma Samuccaya*.

<sup>67</sup> *Vibhanga*.

ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions, and beliefs (*dhamma-taṇhā*).<sup>68</sup> According to the *Buddha's* analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world, from little personal quarrels in families to great wars between nations and countries, arise out of this selfish craving.<sup>69</sup> From this point of view, all economic, political, and social problems are rooted in this selfish craving. Great statesmen, who try to settle international disputes and talk of war and peace only in economic and political terms, touch the superficialities and never go deep into the real root of the problem. As the *Buddha* told Rattapāla: “The world lacks, hankers for, and is enslaved to craving (*taṇhādāso*).”

Everyone will admit that all the evils in the world are produced by selfish desire. This is not difficult to understand. But how this desire, this craving (*taṇhā*), can produce re-existence and re-becoming (*ponobhavikā*) is a problem not so easy to grasp. It is here that we have to discuss the deeper philosophical side of the Second Noble Truth corresponding to the philosophical side of the First Noble Truth. Here, we must have some idea about the theory of *kamma* (Sanskrit *karma*) and rebirth.

There are four Nutriments (*āhāra*) in the sense of “cause” or “condition” necessary for the existence and continuity of beings: (1) ordinary material food (*kabalīkārahāra*); (2) contact of our sense organs (including mind) with the external world (*phassāhāra*); (3) consciousness (*viññāṇāhāra*); and (4) mental volition or will (*manosañcetanāhāra*).<sup>70</sup>

Of these four, the last mentioned, “mental volition”, is the will to live, to exist, to continue, to become more and more.<sup>71</sup> It creates the root of existence and continuity, striving forward by way of good and bad actions (*kusalākusalakamma*).<sup>72</sup> It is the same as “Volition” (*cetanā*).<sup>73</sup> We saw earlier<sup>74</sup> that volition is *kamma*, as the *Buddha* Himself has defined it. Referring to “mental volition” just mentioned above, the *Buddha* says: “When one understands the nutriment of mental volition, one understands the three forms of craving (*taṇhā*).”<sup>75</sup> Thus, the terms “craving”, “volition”, “mental volition”, and “*kamma*” all denote the same thing: they devote the desire, the will to be, to exist, to re-exist, to become more and more, to grow more and more, to accumulate more and more. This is the cause of the arising of *dukkha*, and this is found within the Aggregate of Mental Formations (*samkhāra*), one of the Five Aggregates which constitute a being.<sup>76</sup>

Here is one of the most important and essential points in the *Buddha's* Teaching. We must, therefore, clearly and carefully mark and remember that the cause, the germ, of the arising of *dukkha* is within *dukkha* itself and not outside; and we must equally well remember that the cause, the germ, of the cessation of *dukkha*, of the destruction of

<sup>68</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I; *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II; *Vibhanga*.

<sup>69</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>70</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>71</sup> It is interesting to compare this “mental volition” with “libido” in modern psychology.

<sup>72</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>73</sup> *Manosañcetanā'ti cetanā eva vuccati. Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>74</sup> Chapter 3, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II. The three forms of craving (*taṇhā*) are: (1) craving for sense pleasures; (2) craving for existence and becoming; and (3) craving for non-existence, as given in the definition of *samudaya* “the arising of *dukkha*” above.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 16—22, for details about the Five Aggregates.

*dukkha*, is also within *dukkha* itself and not outside. This is what is meant by the well-known formula often found in original Pāli texts: *Yam kiñci samudayadhammam sabbam tañ nirodhadhammam* “Whatever is of the nature of arising, all that is of the nature of cessation.”<sup>77</sup> A being, a thing, or a system, if it has also within itself the nature of arising, the nature of coming into being, has also within itself the nature, the germ, of its own cessation and destruction. Thus, *dukkha*, that is, the Five Aggregates, has within itself the nature of its own arising and has also within itself the nature of its own cessation. This point will be taken up again in the discussion of the Third Noble Truth, *Nirodha*. Now, the Pāli word *kamma*, or the Sanskrit word *karma* (from the root *kar-* “to do”), literally means “action”, “doing”. But, in the Buddhist theory of *kamma*, it has a specific meaning: it means only “volitional action”, not all action. Nor does it mean the result of *kamma* as many people wrongly and loosely use it. In Buddhist terminology, *kamma* never means its effect; its effect is known as the “fruit” or the “result” of *kamma* (*kamma-phala* or *kamma-vipāka*).

Volition may relatively be good or bad, just as a desire may relatively be good or bad. So *kamma* may be good or bad relatively. Good *kamma* (*kusala*) produces good effects, and bad *kamma* (*akusala*) produces bad effects. Craving, volition, *kamma*, whether good or bad, has one force as its effect: the force to continue — to continue in a good or bad direction. Whether good or bad, it is relative, and it is within the cycle of continuity known as “*samsāra*”. An *Arahant*, though he acts, does not accumulate *kamma*, because he is free from the craving for continuity and becoming, free from all other defilements and impurities (*kilesa*, *sāsavā dhammā*). For him, there is no rebirth.

The theory of *kamma* should not be confused with so-called “moral justice” or “reward and punishment”. The idea of moral justice, or reward and punishment, arises out of the conception of a supreme being, a God, who sits in judgment, who is a lawgiver and who decides what is right and wrong. The term “justice” is ambiguous and dangerous, and more harm than good has been done to humanity in its name. The theory of *kamma* is the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction; it is a natural law, which has nothing to do with the idea of justice or reward and punishment. Every volitional action produces its effects or results. If a good action produces good effects and a bad action bad effects, it is not justice, or reward, or punishment meted out by anybody or any power sitting in judgment on our action, but this is due to its own nature, its own law. This is not difficult to understand. But what is difficult is that, according to the theory of *kamma*, the effects of a volitional action may continue to manifest themselves even in a life after death. Here, we have to explain what death is according to Buddhism.

We have seen earlier that a being is nothing but a combination of physical and mental forces or energies. What we call death is the total non-functioning of the physical body. Do all these forces and energies stop altogether with the non-functioning of the body? Buddhism says “No”. Will, volition, desire, craving to exist, to continue, to become more and more, is a tremendous force that moves whole lives, whole existences — that even moves the whole world. According to Buddhism, this force does not stop

<sup>77</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* III; *Samyutta Nikāya* IV and V.

with the non-functioning of the body, which is death, but it continues manifesting itself in another form, producing re-existence, which is called “rebirth”.

Now, another question arises: If there is no permanent, unchanging entity or substance like a Self or Soul (*attā* [Sanskrit *ātman*]), what is it that can re-exist or be reborn after death? Before we discuss life after death, let us consider what this life is, and how it continues now. What we call life, as we have so often repeated, is the combination of the Five Aggregates, a combination of physical and mental energies. These are constantly changing — they do not remain the same for two consecutive moments. Every moment, they are born and they die. “When the Aggregates arise, decay and die, O *Bhikkhu*, every moment you are born, decay, and die.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, even now during this lifetime, every moment we are born and die, but yet, we continue. If we can understand that, in this life, we can continue without a permanent, unchanging substance like a Self or Soul, it should not be difficult for us to understand that these forces can continue without a Self or Soul behind them after the non-functioning of the body as well.

When this physical body is no longer capable of functioning, karmic energies do not die with it, but continue to take some other shape or form, which we call “another life”. In a child, all the physical, mental, and intellectual faculties are tender and weak, but they have within themselves the potentiality to produce a full-grown man. Likewise, the physical and mental energies which constitute the so-called “being” have within themselves the power to take a new form, to grow gradually, and to gather force to the fullest.

Since there is no permanent, unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next. So quite obviously, nothing permanent or unchanging can pass or transmigrate from one life to the next. It is a series that continues unbroken, but changes every moment. The series is, really speaking, nothing but movement. It is like a flame that burns throughout the night: it is not the same flame, nor is it another. A child grows up to be a man of sixty. Certainly, the man of sixty is not the same as the child of sixty years ago, nor is he another person. Similarly, a person who dies here and is reborn elsewhere is neither the same person nor another (*na ca so na ca añño*). It is the continuity of the same series. The difference between death and birth is only a thought moment: the last thought moment of this life conditions the first thought moment in the so-called “next life”, which in fact, is the continuity of the same series. During the life itself, too, one thought moment conditions the next thought moment. Hence, from the Buddhist point of view, the question of life after death is not a great mystery, and a Buddhist is never worried about this problem.

As long as there is this craving to be and to become, the cycle of continuity known as “*saṃsāra*” goes on. It can stop only when its driving force, this craving, is cut off through wisdom (*paññā*) which sees Reality, Truth, *nibbāna*. ■

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<sup>78</sup> *Khandhesu jāyamānesu jīyamānesu mīyamānesu ca khaṇe khaṇe tvaṃ bhikkhu jāyase ca jīyase ca mīyase ca*. This is quoted in the *Paramatthajotikā* Commentary as the *Buddha*’s own words.

# 5

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## The Third Noble Truth

The Third Noble Truth is that there is emancipation, liberation, freedom from suffering, from the continuity of *dukkha*. This is called the Noble Truth of the Cessation of *dukkha* (*Dukkhanirodha Ariyasacca*), which is *nibbāna*, more popularly known in its Sanskrit form, *nirvāṇa*.

To eliminate *dukkha* completely, one has to eliminate the main root of *dukkha*, which is craving (*taṇhā*), as we saw in the previous chapter. Therefore, *nibbāna* is also known by the term *taṇhakkhaya* “Extinction of Craving”.

Now, we may ask: “But what is *nibbāna*?” Volumes have been written in reply to this quite natural and simple question; they have, more and more, only confused the issue rather than clarified it. The only reasonable reply to give to the question is that it can never be answered completely and satisfactorily in words, because human language is not capable of expressing the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality that is *nibbāna*. Language was created by and is used by human beings to express things and ideas experienced by their sense organs and their mind. A supramundane experience like that of the Absolute Truth does not fall into such a category. Therefore, there are no words to express that experience, just as the fish in the famous fable had no words in his vocabulary to express the nature of solid land. The tortoise told his friend (the fish) that he (the tortoise) had just returned to the lake after a walk on dry land. “Of course”, the fish said, “You mean swimming.” The tortoise tried to explain that one could not swim on the land, that it was solid, and that one walked on it. But the fish insisted that there could be nothing like it, that it must be liquid like the lake, with waves, and that one must be able to dive and swim there.

Words are symbols representing things and ideas known to us, and these symbols do not and cannot convey the true nature of even ordinary things. Language is considered deceptive and misleading in the matter of understanding of the Truth. Thus, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*<sup>79</sup> says that ignorant people get stuck in words like an elephant in the mud.

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<sup>79</sup> The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (“Sūtra of the Appearance of the Good Doctrine in Laṅkā”) is a distinctive and influential philosophical treatise of Mahāyāna Buddhism that is said to have been spoken by the *Buddha* in the mythical city of Laṅkā. Dating from perhaps the 4th century CE, although parts of it may be earlier, it is the chief canonical exposition of *vijñānavāda* (“doctrine of consciousness”), or subjective idealism. It teaches that the world is an illusory reflection of ultimate, undifferentiated mind and that this truth suddenly becomes an inner realization in concentrated meditation. The thought of the *Laṅkāvatāra* is reflected in the Yogācāra School of Mahāyāna Buddhism and provides some of the philosophical background of Zen.

Nevertheless, we cannot do without language. But, if *nibbāna* is expressed and explained in positive terms, we are likely to grasp onto an idea of what *nibbāna* is based upon those terms, which may be quite the contrary to the actual experience. Therefore, *nibbāna* is generally explained in negative terms<sup>80</sup> — a less dangerous mode perhaps. Hence, it is often referred to by such terms as *taṇhakkhaya* “Extinction of Craving”, *asaṃkhata* “Uncompound, Unconditioned”, *nirodha* “Cessation”, *virāga* “Absence of desire”, *nibbāna* “Blowing out, Extinction”.

Let us now consider a few definitions and descriptions of *nibbāna* as found in the original Pāli texts:

“It is the complete cessation of that very craving (*taṇhā*), giving it up, renouncing it, emancipation from it, detachment from it.”<sup>81</sup>

“Calming of all conditioned things, giving up of all defilements, extinction of craving, detachment, cessation, *nibbāna*.”<sup>82</sup>

‘O *Bhikkhus*, what is the Absolute (*asaṃkhata*, ‘Unconditioned’)? It is, O *Bhikkhus*, the extinction of desire (*rāgakkhaya*), the extinction of hatred (*dosakkhaya*), the extinction of delusion (*mohakkhaya*). This, O *Bhikkhus*, is called the ‘Absolute’.”<sup>83</sup>

“O Rādhā, the extinction of craving (*taṇhakkhaya*) is *nibbāna*.”<sup>84</sup>

‘O *Bhikkhus*, whatever things conditioned or unconditioned there may be, among them, detachment (*virāga*) is the highest. That is to say, freedom from conceit, destruction of thirst,<sup>85</sup> the uprooting of attachment, the cutting off of continuity, the extinction of craving (*taṇhā*), detachment, cessation, *nibbāna*.”<sup>86</sup>

The reply of Sāriputta, the chief disciple of the *Buddha*, to a direct question “What is *nibbāna*?” posed by a *parivrajaka*,<sup>87</sup> is identical with the definition of *asaṃkhata* given by the *Buddha* (above): “The extinction of desire (*rāgakkhaya*), the extinction of hatred (*dosakkhaya*), the extinction of delusion (*mohakkhaya*).”<sup>88</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Sometimes, positive terms like *siva* “Auspicious, Good”, *khema* “Safety”, *suddhi* “Purity”, *dīpa* “Island”, *saraṇa* “Refuge”, *tāṇa* “Protection”, *pāra* “Opposite Shore, Other Side”, *santi* “Peace, Tranquility” are used to denote *nibbāna*. There are thirty-two synonyms for *nibbāna* listed in the *Asaṃkhata Saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. They are mostly metaphorical.

<sup>81</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Mahāvagga; *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V. It is interesting to note that this description of *nirodha* “Cessation of *Dukkha*”, which is found in the first discourse of the *Buddha* at Sarnath, does not contain the word “*nibbāna*”, though the definition means it.

<sup>82</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* I.

<sup>83</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV.

<sup>84</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.

<sup>85</sup> Here, the Pāli word is “*pipāsā*”, which literally means “thirst”.

<sup>86</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* II.

<sup>87</sup> “*Parivrajaka*” is a Sanskrit term meaning “a wandering religious mendicant, a wandering ascetic”.

<sup>88</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV.

“The abandoning and destruction of desire and craving for these Five Aggregates of Attachment: that is the cessation of *dukkha*.”<sup>89</sup>

“The cessation of continuity and becoming (*bhavanirodha*) is *nibbāna*.”<sup>90</sup>

And further, referring to *nibbāna*, the *Buddha* says: “There is, O *Bhikkhus*, the unborn, unoriginated, unmade, and unconditioned. Were there not the unborn, unoriginated, unmade, and unconditioned, there could be no escape from the born, originated, made, and conditioned. Since there is the unborn, unoriginated, unmade, and unconditioned, there is escape from the born, originated, made, and conditioned.”<sup>91</sup>

“Here, the four elements of solidity, fluidity, heat, and motion have no place; the notions of length and breadth, the subtle and the gross, good and evil, name and form are altogether destroyed; neither this world nor the other, nor coming, going, or standing, neither death nor birth, nor sense objects are to be found.”<sup>92</sup>

Because *nibbāna* is thus expressed in negative terms, there are those who have gotten a wrong notion that it is negative and expresses self-annihilation. *Nibbāna* is definitely not annihilation of Self, because there is no Self to annihilate. If at all, it is the annihilation of the delusion, of the false idea of Self. It is incorrect to say that *nibbāna* is negative or positive. The ideas of “negative” and “positive” are relative and are within the realm of duality. These terms cannot be applied to *nibbāna*, Absolute Truth, which is beyond duality and relativity.

A negative word need not necessarily indicate a negative state. The Pāli (and Sanskrit) word for “health” is *ārogya*, a negative term, which literally means “absence of illness”. But *ārogya* (“health”) does not represent a negative state. The word “Immortal” (or its Pāli equivalent *amata* [Sanskrit *amṛta*]), which also is a synonym for *nibbāna*, is negative, but it does not denote a negative state. The negation of negative values is not negative. One of the well-known synonyms for *nibbāna* is “Freedom” (Pāli *mutti* [Sanskrit *mukti*]). Nobody would say that freedom is negative. But even freedom has a negative side: freedom is always a liberation from something which is obstructive, which is evil, which is negative. But freedom is not negative. So *nibbāna*, *mutti*, or *vimutti*, the Absolute Freedom, is freedom from all evil, freedom from craving, hatred, and ignorance, freedom from all terms of duality, relativity, time, and space.

We may get some idea of *nibbāna* as Absolute Truth from the Dhātuvibhanga Sutta (no. 140) of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. This extremely important discourse was delivered by the *Buddha* to Pukkusāti (previously mentioned), whom the Master found to be intelligent and earnest, in the quiet of the night in a potter’s shed. The essence of the relevant portions of the *sutta* is as follows:

<sup>89</sup> These words were spoken by Sāriputta. *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>90</sup> These words were spoken by Musīla, another disciple of the *Buddha*. *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II.

<sup>91</sup> *Udāna*, Cūḷavagga.

<sup>92</sup> *Udāna*; *Dīgha Nikāya* I.

A man is composed of six elements: solidity, fluidity, heat, motion, space, and consciousness. He analyses them and finds that none of them is “mine”, or “me”, or “myself”. He understands how consciousness appears and disappears, how pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations appear and disappear. Through this knowledge, his mind becomes detached. Then, he finds within himself a pure equanimity (*upekkhā*), which he can direct towards the attainment of any high spiritual state, and he thus knows that this pure equanimity will last for a long period of time.

But then, he thinks: “If I focus this purified and cleansed equanimity on the Sphere of Infinite Space (*ākāśānañcāyatana*) and develop a mind conforming to that state, then, that is a mental creation (*saṁkhata*).<sup>93</sup> If I focus this purified and cleansed equanimity on the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*) and develop a mind conforming to that state, then, that is a mental creation. If I focus this purified and cleansed equanimity on the Sphere of Nothingness (*ākāśaññāyatana*) and develop a mind conforming to that state, then, that is a mental creation. If I focus this purified and cleansed equanimity on the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception (*nevasaññā-n’āsaññāyatana*) and develop a mind conforming to that state, then, that is a mental creation.”

Then, he neither mentally creates nor wills continuity and becoming (*bhava*) or annihilation (*vibhava*).<sup>94</sup> Since he neither creates nor wills continuity and becoming or annihilation, he does not cling to anything in the world; since he does not cling, he is not anxious; since he is not anxious, he is completely calmed within (“fully blown out within” [*paccattam yeva parinibbāyati*]). And he knows: “Finished is birth, lived is the holy life (*brahmacariya*), what should be done has been done, there is nothing more left to be done.”<sup>95</sup>

Now, when he experiences a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensation, he knows that it is impermanent (*anicca*), that it does not bind him, that it is not experienced with passion. Whatever may be the sensation, he experiences it without being bound to it (*visamyutto*). He knows that all those sensations will be pacified with the dissolution of the body, just as the flame of a lamp goes out when oil and wick give out.

“Therefore, O *Bhikkhu*, a person so endowed is endowed with the absolute wisdom, for the knowledge of the extinction of all *dukkha* is the absolute noble wisdom. Thus, his deliverance, founded on Truth, is unshakable. O *Bhikkhu*, that which is unreality (*mosadhamma*) is false; that which is reality (*amosadhamma*), *nibbāna*, is Truth (*sacca*). Therefore, O *Bhikkhu*, that person so endowed is endowed with this Absolute Truth. For, the Absolute Noble Truth (*paramam ariyasaccam*) is *nibbāna*, which is Reality.”

Elsewhere, the *Buddha* unequivocally uses the word “Truth” in place of *nibbāna*: “I will teach you the Truth and the Path leading to the Truth.”<sup>96</sup> Here, “Truth” definitely means *nibbāna*.

<sup>93</sup> Notice that all the spiritual and mystical states, however pure and exalted they may be, are mental creations, mind-made, conditioned, and compound (*saṁkhata*). They are not Reality, not Truth (*sacca*).

<sup>94</sup> This means that he does not produce new *kamma*, because now he is free from craving, will, and volition.

<sup>95</sup> This expression means that he is now an *Arahant*.

<sup>96</sup> *Saṁyutta Nikāya* V.



Now, what is Absolute Truth? According to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, conditioned, and impermanent, and that there is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance like Self, Soul, or *ātman* within or without. This is the Absolute Truth. Truth is never negative, though there is a popular expression “negative truth”. The realization of this Truth, that is, to see things as they really are (*yathābhūtam*)<sup>97</sup> without delusion (*moha*) or ignorance (*avijjā*) is the extinction of craving (*taṇhakkhaya*) and the cessation (*nirodha*) of *dukkha*, which is *nibbāna*. It is interesting and useful to remember here the Mahāyāna view of *nibbāna* as not being different from *saṃsāra*.<sup>98</sup> The same thing is *saṃsāra* or *nibbāna* according to the way you look at it — subjectively or objectively. This Mahāyāna view was probably developed out of the ideas found in the original Theravādin Pāli texts, to which we have just referred in our brief discussion.

It is incorrect to think that *nibbāna* is the natural result of the extinction of craving. *Nibbāna* is not the result of anything. If it were a result, then, it would be an effect produced by a cause. It would be *saṃkhata* “produced” and “conditioned”. *Nibbāna* is neither cause nor effect. It is beyond cause and effect. Truth is not a result, nor is it an effect. It is not produced like a mystical or spiritual mental state, such as *jhāna* or *samādhi*. TRUTH IS. NIBBĀNA IS. The only thing you can do is to see it, to realize it. There is a path leading to the realization of *nibbāna*. But *nibbāna* is not the result of this path.<sup>99</sup> You may get to the mountain along a path but the mountain is not the result, nor is it an effect of the path. You may see a light, but the light is not the result of your eyesight.

People often ask: “What is there after *nibbāna*?” This question has no meaning, no relevancy, because *nibbāna* is the Ultimate Truth. If it is the Ultimate, there can be nothing after it. If there is anything after *nibbāna*, then, that will be the Ultimate Truth and not *nibbāna*. A monk named Rādhā put this question to the *Buddha* in a different form: “For what purpose (or end) is *nibbāna*?” This question presupposes something after *nibbāna* when it postulates some purpose or end for it. So the *Buddha* answered: “O Rādhā, this question could not catch its limit (that is, it is beside the point). One lives the holy life with *nibbāna* as its final plunge (into the Absolute Truth), as its goal, as its ultimate end.”<sup>100</sup>

Some popular inaccurately phrased expressions like “The *Buddha* entered into *nibbāna* or *parinibbāna* after his death” have given rise to many imaginary speculations about *nibbāna*.<sup>101</sup> The moment you hear the phrase that “the *Buddha* entered into *nibbāna* or *parinibbāna*”, you take *nibbāna* to be a state, or a realm, or a position in which there is some sort of existence, and try to imagine it in terms of the senses of the

<sup>97</sup> *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*: “O Mahāmati, *nirvāṇa* means to see the state of things as they are.”

<sup>98</sup> In the *Mūlamādhyamikakārikā*, Nāgārjuna clearly says that “*saṃsāra* has no difference whatever from *nirvāṇa*, and *nirvāṇa* has no difference whatever from *saṃsāra*.”

<sup>99</sup> It is useful to remember here that, among nine supramundane *dharmas* (*nava-lokuttara-dhamma*), *nibbāna* is beyond *magga* (“path”) and *phala* (“fruit”).

<sup>100</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.

<sup>101</sup> There are some who have written “after the *nibbāna* of the *Buddha*” instead of “after the *parinibbāna* of the *Buddha*”. “After the *nibbāna* of the *Buddha*” has no meaning, and the expression is unknown in the canonical Buddhist literature. It is always “after the *parinibbāna* of the *Buddha*”.

word “existence” as it is known to you. This popular expression “entered into *nibbāna*” has no equivalent in the original texts. There is no such thing as “entering into *nibbāna* after death”. There is a word “*parinibbuto*” used to denote the death of the *Buddha* or an *Arahant* who has realized *nibbāna*, but it does not mean “entering into *nibbāna*”. *Parinibbuto* simply means “fully passed away”, “fully blown out”, or “fully extinct”, because the *Buddha* or an *Arahant* has no re-existence after his death.

Now another question arises: “What happens to the *Buddha* or an *Arahant* after his death, after *parinibbāna*?” This comes under the category of unanswered questions (*avyākata*).<sup>102</sup> Even when the *Buddha* spoke about this, He indicated that no words in our vocabulary could express what happens to an *Arahant* after his death. In reply to a *parivrājaka* named Vaccha, the *Buddha* said that terms like “born” or “not born” do not apply in the case of an *Arahant*, because those things — matter, sensation, perception, mental activities, consciousness — with which the terms like “born” and “not born” are associated, are completely destroyed and uprooted, never to rise again after his death.<sup>103</sup>

After his death, an *Arahant* is often compared to a fire gone out when the supply of wood is over, or to the flame of a lamp gone out when the wick and oil are finished.<sup>104</sup> Here, it should be clearly and distinctly understood, without any confusion, that what is compared to a flame or a fire gone out is not *nibbāna*, but the “being” (*satta*) composed of the Five Aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) who realized *nibbāna*. This point has to be emphasized because many people, even some great scholars, have misunderstood and misinterpreted this simile as referring to *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is never compared to a fire or a lamp gone out.

There is another popular question: “If there is no Self, no *ātman*, who realizes *nibbāna*?” Before we go on to *nibbāna*, let us ask the question: “Who thinks now, if there is no Self?” We have seen earlier that it is the thought that thinks, that there is no thinker behind the thought. In the same way, it is wisdom (*paññā*), realization, that realizes. There is no other Self behind the realization. In the discussion of the origin of *dukkha*, we saw that whatever it may be — whether being, or thing, or system —, if it is of the nature of arising, it has within itself the nature, the germ, of its cessation, its destruction. Now *dukkha*, *saṃsāra*, the cycle of continuity, is of the nature of arising; it must, thus, also be of the nature of cessation. *Dukkha* arises because of craving (*taṇhā*), and it ceases because of wisdom (*paññā*). Craving and wisdom are both within the Five Aggregates, as we saw earlier.<sup>105</sup>

Thus, the germ of their arising as well as that of their cessation are both within the Five Aggregates. This is the real meaning of the *Buddha*’s well-known statement: “Within this fathom-long body itself, I postulate the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world.”<sup>106</sup> This means that all of the Four Noble Truths are found within the Five Aggregates, that is, within

<sup>102</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV.

<sup>103</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>104</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I and III; *Sutta Nipāta*, verse 232.

<sup>105</sup> See the discussion under Aggregate of Mental Formations (*saṃkhārakkhandha*) in Chapter 3, p. 17.

<sup>106</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*.

ourselves. (Here, the word “world” [*loka*] is used in place of *dukkha*.) This also means that there is no external power that produces the arising and the cessation of *dukkha*.

When wisdom is developed and cultivated according to the Fourth Noble Truth (the next to be taken up), it sees the secret of life, the reality of things as they are. When the secret is discovered, when the Truth is seen, all the forces which feverishly produce the continuity of *samsāra*, *dukkha*, become calm and incapable of producing any more *kamma*-formations, because there is no more delusion, no more craving for continuity. It is like a mental disease which is cured when the cause or the secret of the malady is discovered and seen by the patient.

In almost all religions, the *summum bonum* can be attained only after death. But *nibbāna* can be realized in this very life; it is not necessary to wait until you die to “attain” it.

He who has realized the Truth, *nibbāna*, is the happiest being in the world. He is free from all “complexes” and obsessions, the worries and troubles that torment others. His mental health is perfect. He does not repent the past, nor does he brood over the future. He lives fully in the present.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, he appreciates and enjoys things in the purest sense without self-projections. He is joyful, exultant, enjoying the pure life, his faculties pleased, free from anxiety, serene, and peaceful.<sup>108</sup> Since he is free from selfish desire, hatred, ignorance, conceit, pride, and all such “defilements”, he is pure and gentle, full of universal love, compassion, kindness, sympathy, understanding, and tolerance. His service to others is of the purest, for he has no thought of self. He gains nothing, accumulates nothing, not even anything spiritual, because he is free from the delusion of Self, and the craving for becoming.

*Nibbāna* is beyond all terms of duality and relativity. It is, therefore, beyond our conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, existence and non-existence. Even the word “happiness” (*sukha*), which is used to describe *nibbāna*, has an entirely different meaning here. Sāriputta once proclaimed: “O friend, *nibbāna* is happiness! *Nibbāna* is happiness!” Whereupon, Udāyi asked Sāriputta: “But, friend Sāriputta, what happiness can it be if there is no sensation?” Sāriputta’s reply was highly philosophical and beyond ordinary comprehension: “That there is no sensation itself is happiness.”

*Nibbāna* is beyond logic and reasoning (*atakkāvacara*). However much we may engage, often as a vain intellectual pastime, in highly speculative discussions regarding *nibbāna* or Ultimate Truth or Reality, we shall never understand it that way. A child in the kindergarten should not quarrel about the theory of relativity. Instead, if he follows his studies patiently and diligently, then one day, he may understand it. *Nibbāna* is “to be realized by the wise within themselves”. If we follow the Path (*magga*) patiently and with diligence, train and purify ourselves earnestly, and achieve the necessary spiritual development, we may one day realize it within ourselves — without taxing ourselves with puzzling and high-sounding words.

Let us, therefore, now turn to the Path that leads to the realization of *nibbāna*. ■

<sup>107</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* I.

<sup>108</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* II.



# 6

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## The Fourth Noble Truth

The Fourth Noble Truth is that of the Way (*magga*) leading to the Cessation of *Dukkha* (*Dukkhanirodhagāmiṇīpaṭipadā Ariyasacca*). This is known as the “Middle Path” (*majjhimā paṭipadā*), because it avoids two extremes: (1) one extreme being the search for happiness through the pleasures of the senses, which is “low, common, unprofitable, and the way of the ordinary people”; and (2) the other being the search for happiness through self-mortification in different forms of asceticism, which is “painful, unworthy, and unprofitable”. Having Himself first tried these two extremes, and having found them to be useless, the *Buddha* discovered, through His own personal experience, the Middle Path “which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to Calm, to Insight, to Enlightenment, to *nibbāna*.” This Middle Path is generally referred to as the “Noble Eightfold Path” (*Ariya-Aṭṭhangika-Magga*), because it is composed of eight categories or divisions, namely:

1. Right Understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*);
2. Right Thought (*sammā sankappa*);
3. Right Speech (*sammā vācā*);
4. Right Action (*sammā kammanta*);
5. Right Livelihood (*sammā ājīva*);
6. Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*);
7. Right Mindfulness (*sammā sati*);
8. Right Concentration (*sammā samādhi*).

Practically the whole Teaching of the *Buddha*, to which He devoted Himself during forty-five years, deals in some way or other with this Path. He explained it in different ways and in different words to different people, according to the stage of their development and their capacity to understand and follow Him. But the essence of those many thousands of discourses scattered in the Buddhist Scriptures is found in the Noble Eightfold Path.

It should not be thought that the eight categories or divisions of the Path are to be followed and practiced one after the other in the numerical order as given in the usual list above. On the contrary, they are to be developed more or less simultaneously, as far as possible, according to the capacity of each individual. They are all linked together, and each helps the cultivation of the others.

These eight factors aim at promoting and perfecting the three essentials or aspects of Buddhist training and discipline, namely: (1) Ethical or Virtuous Conduct (*sīla*); (2)

Mental Discipline (*samādhi*); and (3) Wisdom (*paññā*).<sup>109</sup> It will, therefore, be more helpful for a coherent and better understanding of the eight divisions of the Path, if we group them and explain them according to these three aspects.

Ethical Conduct (*sīla*) is built on the vast conception of universal love (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) for all living beings, on which the *Buddha's* Teaching is based. It is regrettable that many scholars forget this great ideal of the *Buddha's* Teaching, and indulge in only dry philosophical and metaphysical digressions when they talk and write about Buddhism. The *Buddha* gave His Teaching “for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world” (*bahujanahitāya bahujana-sukhāya lokānukampīya*).

According to Buddhism, for a man to be perfect, there are two qualities that he should develop equally: (1) Compassion (*karuṇā*), on one side; and (2) Wisdom (*paññā*), on the other. Here, compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance, and other such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom stands for the intellectual side, or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only the emotional neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good-hearted fool, while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the emotional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellectual without feeling for others. Therefore, to be perfect, one has to develop both equally. That is the aim of the Buddhist way of life — in it, wisdom and compassion are inseparably linked together, as we shall see later.

Now, three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path are included in Ethical Conduct (*sīla*) based on love and compassion: (1) Right Speech; (2) Right Action; (3) and Right Livelihood.

Right Speech (*sammā vācā*) means abstaining from: (1) telling lies; (2) backbiting, slander, and talk that may bring about hatred, enmity, disunity, and disharmony among individuals or groups of people; (3) harsh, rude, impolite, malicious, and abusive language; and (4) idle, useless, and foolish babble and gossip. When one abstains from these forms of wrong and harmful speech, one naturally has to speak the truth, has to use words that are friendly and benevolent, pleasant and gentle, meaningful and useful. One should not speak carelessly; rather, one should speak at the right time and the right place. If one cannot say something useful, one should maintain “noble silence”.

Right Action (*sammā kammanta*) aims at promoting moral, ethical, honorable, and peaceful conduct. It admonishes us to abstain from destroying life, from taking what is not freely given (stealing), from dishonest dealings, from sexual misconduct (rape, seduction, infidelity), and from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness, and it encourages us also to help others lead a peaceful, useful, and honorable life in accordance with the principles taught by the *Buddha*.

Right Livelihood (*sammā ājīva*) means that one should abstain from earning one's living through a profession that brings harm to others, such as trading in arms and lethal weapons, in intoxicating drinks, and in poisons, killing of animals, cheating, dishonesty, etc., and that one should, instead, live by a profession which is honorable, blameless, and without injury to others. One can clearly see here that Buddhism is strongly opposed to

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<sup>109</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

any kind of war, when it lays down that trade in arms and lethal weapons is an evil and unjust means of livelihood.

These three factors (Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood) of the Noble Eightfold Path constitute Ethical Conduct (*sīla*). It should be realized that the Buddhist ethical and moral code of conduct aims at promoting a happy and harmonious life both for the individual and for society. This moral conduct is considered as the indispensable foundation for all higher spiritual attainments. No spiritual development is possible without this moral basis.

Next comes Mental Discipline (*samādhi*), which includes three other divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path: (1) Right Effort; (2) Right Mindfulness; and (3) Right Concentration.

Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*) is the fourfold effort to put forth the energy, to prod the mind, and to struggle:

1. To prevent unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising;
2. To abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen;
3. To develop wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen;
4. To maintain and perfect wholesome mental states that have already arisen.

In other words, it is the fourfold effort that we make to overcome and avoid fresh bad actions by body, speech, and mind; and the effort that we make in developing fresh actions of righteousness, inner peace, and wisdom, and in cultivating them to perfection.

Right Mindfulness (or Attentiveness) (*sammā sati*) requires us to be diligently aware, mindful, and attentive with regard to: (1) the activities of the body (*kāya*); (2) sensations or feelings (*vedanā*); (3) the state of the mind (*citta*); and (4) the contents of the mind (that is, ideas, thoughts, images, concepts, etc.) (*dhamma*).

The practice of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is one of the better-known exercises, connected with the body, for mental development. There are several other ways of developing attentiveness in relation to the body as modes of meditation.

With regard to sensations and feelings, one should be clearly aware of all forms of feelings and sensations, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, and of how they appear and disappear within oneself.

Concerning the state of the mind, one should be aware whether one's mind is lustful or not, given to hatred or not, deluded or not, distracted or concentrated, etc. In this way, one should be aware of all movements of mind, how they arise and how they disappear.

As regards ideas, thoughts, images, concepts, and the like, one should know their nature, how they appear and disappear, how they are developed, how they are suppressed, how they are destroyed, and so on.

These four forms of mental culture (*bhāvanā*) or meditation are treated in detail in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta ("Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness").<sup>110</sup>

The third and last factor of Mental Discipline is Right Concentration (*sammā samādhi*) leading to the various stages of *jhāna*, generally translated as "absorption". In

<sup>110</sup> See Chapter 8 on Meditation.

the first stage of *jhāna*, passionate desires and certain unwholesome thoughts<sup>111</sup> like sense desire, ill-will, languor, worry, restlessness, and skeptical doubt are discarded, and feelings of rapture (ecstasy, bliss) (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*) are maintained, along with certain subtle intellectual activities. In the second stage of *jhāna*, all intellectual activities are suppressed, and tranquility and “one-pointedness” (*ekaggatā*) of mind are developed, but the feelings of rapture and happiness are still retained. In the third stage of *jhāna*, the feeling of rapture, which is an active sensation, also disappears, while the disposition of happiness still remains in addition to mindful equanimity (*upekkhā*). In the fourth stage of *jhāna*, all sensations, even of happiness and unhappiness, of joy and sorrow, disappear, and only pure equanimity and awareness remain.

Thus, the mind is trained and disciplined and developed through Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The remaining two factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right Thought and Right Understanding, constitute Wisdom (*paññā*).

Right Thought (*sammā sankappa*) denotes: (1) thoughts of renunciation, free from craving; (2) thoughts of good will, free from aversion; and (3) thoughts of non-violence or harmlessness, free from cruelty, which are extended to all living beings. It is very interesting and important to note here that thoughts of selfless detachment, love, and non-violence are grouped on the side of wisdom. This clearly shows that true wisdom is endowed with these noble qualities, and that all thoughts of selfish desire, ill-will, hatred, and violence are the result of a lack of wisdom — in all spheres of life, whether individual, social, or political.

Right Understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*) is the understanding of things as they are, and it is the Four Noble Truths that explain things as they really are. Therefore, Right Understanding refers to the full and correct understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This understanding is the highest wisdom, which sees the Ultimate Reality. According to Buddhism, there are two kinds of understanding: That which is generally referred to as “understanding” is intellectual knowledge, an accumulated memory, the mental grasping of a subject according to certain given data. This is known as “knowing accordingly” (*anubodha*). It is not very deep. Really deep understanding is called “penetration” (*paṭivedha*) — seeing a thing in its true nature, without name and label. This penetration is possible only when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation.<sup>112</sup>

From this brief account of the Noble Eightfold Path, one can see that it is a way of life to be followed, practiced, and developed by each individual. It is self-discipline in body, speech, and mind — a process of self-development and of self-purification. It has nothing at all to do with faith, belief, prayer, worship, or ceremony. In that sense, it has nothing which may popularly be called “religious”. It is a Path leading to the realization of Ultimate Reality, to complete freedom, happiness, and peace, through moral, spiritual, and mental perfection.

In Buddhist countries, there are, to be sure, simple and beautiful customs and ceremonies on religious occasions. They have little to do with the real Path. But they

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<sup>111</sup> This refers to the so-called the “Five Hindrances” (*nīvaraṇa*) — five obstacles to meditation.

<sup>112</sup> *Visuddhimagga*.



have their value in satisfying certain religious emotions and the needs of those who are less advanced and in helping them gradually along the Path.

With regard to the Four Noble Truths, we have four functions to perform: (1) The First Noble Truth is *dukkha*, the nature of life, its suffering, its sorrows and joys, its imperfection and unsatisfactoriness, its impermanence and insubstantiality. With regard to this Truth, our task is to *understand* it as a fact, clearly and completely (*pariññeyya*). (2) The Second Noble Truth is the Origin of *dukkha*, which is craving, accompanied by all other passions, defilements, and impurities. A mere understanding of this fact is not sufficient. Here, our task is to *discard, eliminate, destroy, and eradicate* it (*pahātabba*). (3) The Third Noble Truth is the Cessation of *dukkha*, *nibbāna*, the Absolute Truth, the Ultimate Reality. Here, our task is to *realize* it (*sacchikātabba*). (4) The Fourth Noble Truth is the Path leading to the realization of *nibbāna*. A mere knowledge of the Path, however complete, will not do. In this case, our task is to *cultivate* it (*bhāvetabba*). ■



# 7

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## The Doctrine of No-Soul

What, in general, is suggested by terms such as “Soul”, “Self”, “Ego”, or, to use the Sanskrit expression, “*atman*”, is that, in man, there is a permanent, everlasting, and absolute entity, which is the unchanging substance behind the changing phenomenal world. According to some religions, each individual has such a separate soul which is created by God, and which, finally after death, lives eternally either in heaven or hell, its destiny depending on the judgment of its alleged creator. According to others, it goes through many lives until it is completely purified and becomes finally united with God or Brāhman, Universal Soul or *ātman*, from which it originally emanated. This Soul or Self in man is claimed to be the thinker of thoughts, the feeler of sensations, and the receiver of rewards and punishments for all its actions, good and bad. Such a conception is called the “idea of self” (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*).

Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self, or *ātman*. According to the Teaching of the *Buddha*, the “idea of self” is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of “I”, “me”, and “mine”, selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities, and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world, from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, all the evil in the world can be traced to this view.

Two ideas are psychologically deep-rooted in man: (1) self-protection and (2) self-preservation. For self-protection, man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety, and security, just as a child depends on its parent. For self-preservation, man has conceived the idea of an immortal Soul or *ātman*, which will live eternally. In his ignorance, weakness, fear, and desire, man needs these two things to console himself. Hence, he clings to them deeply and fanatically.

The *Buddha*’s Teaching does not support this ignorance, weakness, fear, and desire, but aims at making man enlightened by removing and destroying them, striking at their very root. According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and Soul are false and empty. Though highly developed as theories, they are, all the same, extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology. These ideas are so deep-rooted in man, and so near and dear to him, that he does not wish to hear, nor does he want to understand, any teaching against them.

The *Buddha* knew this quite well. In fact, He said that His Teaching was “against the current” (*paṭisotagāmi*), against man’s selfish desires. Just four weeks after His Enlightenment, seated under a banyan tree, He thought to Himself: “I have realized this Truth which is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand... comprehensible only by the

wise... Men who are overpowered by passions and surrounded by a mass of darkness cannot see this Truth, which is against the current, which is lofty, deep, subtle, and hard to comprehend.”<sup>113</sup>

With these thoughts in His mind, the *Buddha* hesitated for a moment, whether it would not be in vain if He tried to explain to the world the Truth He had just realized. Then, He compared the world to a lotus pond: In a lotus pond, there are some lotuses still under water; there are others which have risen only up to the water level; there are still others which stand above water and are untouched by it. In the same way in this world, there are men at different levels of spiritual development. Some would understand the Truth. Therefore, the *Buddha* decided to teach it.

The doctrine of *anattā* or No-Soul is the natural result of, or the corollary to, the analysis of the Five Aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) and the Teaching of Dependent Arising or Conditioned Genesis (*paṭicca samuppāda*).<sup>114</sup>

We have seen earlier, in the discussion of the First Noble Truth (*dukkha*), that what we call a “being” or an “individual” is composed of the Five Aggregates, and that, when these are analyzed and examined, there is nothing behind them which can be taken as “I”, *ātman*, or Self, or any unchanging abiding substance. That is the analytical method. The same result is arrived at through the doctrine of Dependent Arising, which is the synthetical method, and, according to this, nothing in the world is absolute. Everything is conditioned, relative, and interdependent. This is the Buddhist theory of relativity.

Before we go into the question of *anattā* proper, it is useful to have a brief idea of Dependent Arising. The principles of this doctrine can be explained in a short formula of four lines:

When this is, that is (*Imasmim sati idam hoti*);  
 This arising, that arises (*Imassuppādā idam uppajjati*);  
 When this is not, that is not (*Imasmim asati idam na hoti*);  
 This ceasing, that ceases (*Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*).<sup>115</sup>

On this principle of conditionality, relativity, and interdependence, the whole existence and continuity of life, as well as its cessation, are explained in a detailed formula which is called “*paṭicca samuppāda*”, “Dependent Arising”, which consists of twelve links arranged in eleven propositions. The eleven propositions are as follows:

1. *Avijjā-paccayā saṃkhārā*: Ignorance (the first link) conditions *kamma*-formations (volitional actions [*cetanā*]): “Volition is action (*kamma*) — thus I say, O Monks; for as soon as volition arises, one does the action, be it by body, speech, or mind.”
2. *Saṃkhāra-paccayā viññāṇam*: The *kamma*-formations (rebirth-producing volitional actions) condition (relinking) consciousness.

<sup>113</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Mahāvagga; *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>114</sup> Explained below.

<sup>115</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* III; *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II.

3. *Viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*: Consciousness conditions mind-and-body (that is, mental and physical phenomena).
4. *Nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ*: Mind-and-body conditions the six sense faculties (that is, the five physical sense organs plus the mind).
5. *Saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso*: The six sense faculties condition contact (that is, impression).
6. *Phassa-paccayā vedanā*: Contact conditions feeling (that is, sensation).
7. *Vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*: Feeling conditions craving (that is, desire).
8. *Taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*: Craving conditions attachment (that is, clinging).
9. *Upādāna-paccayā bhavo*: Attachment conditions the process of becoming (consisting of the active and passive life-process, that is to say, the rebirth-producing karmic process and, as its result, the rebirth process).
10. *Bhava-paccayā jāti*: The process of becoming conditions rebirth.
11. *Jāti-paccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ*: Rebirth conditions decay and death, likewise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus arises, once again, the whole mass of suffering.

This is how life arises, exists, and continues. If we take this formula in its reverse order, we arrive at the cessation of the process: Through the complete cessation of ignorance (*avijjā*), volitional actions or *kamma*-formations (*saṃkhāra*) cease; through the cessation of volitional actions, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) ceases;... through the cessation of birth (*jāti*), decay, death, sorrow, etc. (*jarāmaraṇa*), cease.

It should be clearly remembered that each of these factors is conditioned (*paṭicca-samuppanna*) as well as conditioning (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).<sup>116</sup> Therefore, they are all relative, interdependent, and interconnected, and nothing is absolute or independent; hence, no first cause is accepted by Buddhism, as we have seen earlier. Dependent Arising should be considered as a circle and not as a chain.

The question of Free Will has occupied an important place in Western thought and philosophy. But according to Dependent Arising, this question does not and cannot arise in Buddhist philosophy. If the whole of existence is relative, conditioned, and interdependent, how can will alone be free? Will, like any other thought, is conditioned. So-called “freedom” itself is conditioned and relative. Such a conditioned and relative “Free Will” is not denied. There can be nothing absolutely free, physical or mental, inasmuch as everything is interdependent and relative. If Free Will implies a will independent of conditions, independent of cause and effect, such a thing does not exist. How can a will, or anything for that matter, arise without conditions, away from cause and effect, when the whole of existence is conditioned and relative and is within the law of cause and effect? Here again, in other religions, the idea of Free Will is basically connected with the ideas of God, Soul, justice, reward, and punishment. However, not only is so-called “Free Will” not free, but even the very idea of Free Will is not free from conditions.

According to the doctrine of Dependent Arising, as well as according to the analysis of being into Five Aggregates, the idea of an abiding, immortal substance, inside

<sup>116</sup> *Visuddhimagga*.

man or outside of him, whether it is called “*ātman*”, “I”, “Soul”, “Self”, or “Ego”, is considered only a false belief, a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā*, No-Soul or No-Self.

In order to avoid confusion, it should be mentioned here that, according to Buddhism, there are two kinds of truths: (1) conventional truth (*sammuti-sacca* [Sanskrit *samvṛti-satya*]) and (2) ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca* [Sanskrit *paramārtha-satya*]).<sup>117</sup> When we use such expressions in our daily life as “I”, “you”, “being”, “individual”, etc., we do not lie, because, even though there is no Self or being as such, we are conforming to the conventions of society. But the ultimate truth is that there is no “I” or “being” in reality. As the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* says: “A person (*pudgala*) should be mentioned as existing only in designation (*prajñapti*) (that is, conventionally, there is a being), but not in reality (or substance [*dravya*]).”

The denial of an imperishable *ātman*, Soul, Self, or Ego is a common doctrine of all schools of Buddhism, and, there is, therefore, no reason to assume that Buddhist traditions, which are in complete agreement on this point, have deviated from the original Teaching of the *Buddha*.

It is, therefore, curious that recently there should have been a vain attempt by a few scholars to smuggle the idea of Self into the Teaching of the *Buddha*, quite contrary to the spirit of Buddhism. These scholars respect, admire, and venerate the *Buddha* and His Teaching. They look up to Buddhism. But they cannot imagine that the *Buddha*, whom they consider the most clear and profound thinker, could have denied the existence of an *ātman*, Soul, Self, or Ego, which they need so much. They unconsciously seek the support of the *Buddha* for this need for eternal existence — of course, not in a petty individual “self” with a lower case “s”, but in the big “Self” with a capital “S”.

It is better to say frankly that one believes in an *ātman*, Soul, Self, or Ego. Or one may even say that the *Buddha* was totally wrong in denying the existence of an *ātman*. But certainly, it will not do for anyone to try to introduce into Buddhism an idea which the *Buddha* never accepted, as far as we can see from the extant original texts.

Religions that believe in God and Soul make no secret about these two ideas; on the contrary, they proclaim them, constantly and repeatedly, in the most eloquent terms. If the *Buddha* had accepted these two ideas, so important in other religions, He certainly would have declared them publicly, just as He had spoken about other things, and would not have left them hidden to be discovered only twenty-six centuries after His death.

People become nervous at the idea that, through the *Buddha*’s Teaching of *anattā*, the Self they imagine they have is going to be destroyed. The *Buddha* was not unaware of this. A *Bhikkhu* once asked Him: “Sir, is there a case where one is tormented when something permanent within oneself is not found?”

“Yes, *Bhikkhu*, there is,” answered the *Buddha*. “A man has the following view: ‘The universe is that *ātman*, I shall be that after death, permanent, abiding, everlasting, unchanging, and I shall exist as for eternity.’ He hears the *Tathāgata* or a disciple of His, teaching the doctrine aimed at the complete destruction of all speculative views... aimed at the extinction of craving, aimed at detachment, cessation, *nibbāna*. Then, that man thinks: ‘I will be annihilated, I will be destroyed, I will be no more.’ So he mourns,

<sup>117</sup> *Sāratthappakāsinī* II.

worries himself, laments, weeps, beating his breast, and becomes bewildered. Thus, O *Bhikkhu*, there is a case where one is tormented when something permanent within oneself is not found.”<sup>118</sup>

Elsewhere, the *Buddha* says: “O *Bhikkhus*, this idea that ‘I may not be, I may not have’, is frightening to the uninstructed worldling (*puthujjana*).”<sup>119</sup>

Those who want to find a “Self” in Buddhism argue as follows: It is true that the *Buddha* analyzes a being into matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, and says that none of these things is Self. But He does not say that there is no Self at all in man or anywhere else, apart from these aggregates. This position is untenable for two reasons: One is that, according to the *Buddha’s* Teaching, a being is composed only of these Five Aggregates and nothing more. Nowhere has He said that there was anything more than these Five Aggregates in a being. The second reason is that the *Buddha* denied categorically, in unequivocal terms, in more than one place, the existence of *ātman*, Soul, Self, or Ego within man or without, or anywhere else in the universe.

Let us take some examples. In the *Dhammapada*, there are three verses which are extremely important and essential in the *Buddha’s* Teaching. They are verses 277, 278, and 279 in Chapter 20:

- 277. All compound things are impermanent; those who realize this through insight-wisdom are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.
- 278. All compound things have suffering as their nature; those who realize this through insight-wisdom are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.
- 279. All states are without self; those who realize this through insight-wisdom are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.

The first two verses say: “All compound things (*saṃkhārā*) are impermanent” (*sabbe saṃkhārā aniccā*) and “All compound things have suffering as their nature” (*sabbe saṃkhārā dukkhā*). But the third verse says: “All states (*dhammā*) are without self” (*sabbe dhammā anattā*).

Here, it should be carefully observed that, in the first two verses, the word *saṃkhārā* “conditioned things, compound things” is used. But in its place in the third verse, the word *dhammā* “states” is used. Why does the third verse not use the word *saṃkhārā* “conditioned things, compound things” as in the previous two verses, and why does it use the term *dhammā* instead? Here lies the crux of the whole matter.

In the first two verses, the term *saṃkhārā*<sup>120</sup> denotes the Five Aggregates, that is, all conditioned, interdependent, relative things and states, both physical and mental. If the third verse had said: “All *saṃkhārā* (“conditioned things, compound things”) are

<sup>118</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in *Majjhima Nikāyaṭṭhakakathā*, *Papañcasūdanī* II.

<sup>120</sup> *Samkhāra* (plural *saṃkhārā*) in the list of the Five Aggregates means “Mental Formations” or “Mental Activities” producing karmic effects. But here, it means all conditioned or compounded things, including all the Five Aggregates. The term “*saṃkhāra*” has different connotations in different contexts.

without self”, then, one might think that, although conditioned things are without Self, yet there may be a Self outside conditioned things, outside the Five Aggregates. It is in order to avoid misunderstanding that the term *dhammā* is used in the third verse.

The term “*dhamma*” is much wider than *saṃkhāra*. There is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than *dhamma*. It includes not only the conditioned things and states, but also the unconditioned, the Absolute, *nibbāna*. There is nothing in the universe or outside of it, good or bad, conditioned or unconditioned, relative or absolute, which is not included in this term. Therefore, it is quite clear that, according to this statement: “All states (*dhammā*) are without self”, there is no Self, no *ātman*, not only in the Five Aggregates, but nowhere else either outside them or apart from them.

This means, according to the Theravādin teaching, that there is no Self either in the individual (*puggala*) or in *dhammas*. The Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy maintains exactly the same position, without the slightest difference, on this point, putting emphasis on *dharma-nairātmya* as well as on *pudgala-nairātmya*.

In the Alagaddūpama Sutta (no. 22) of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Buddha* said to His disciples: “O *Bhikkhus*, one may well accept a soul-theory (*attavāda*), according to which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, and tribulation merely through its acceptance. But, do you see, O *Bhikkhus*, such a soul-theory, according to which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, and tribulation merely through its acceptance?”

“Certainly not, Sir.”

“Good, O *Bhikkhus*. I, too, O *Bhikkhus*, do not see a soul-theory, according to which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, and tribulation merely through its acceptance.”

If there had been any soul-theory which the *Buddha* had accepted, He would certainly have explained it here, because He asked the *Bhikkhus* to accept that soul-theory which did not produce suffering. But in the *Buddha*’s view, there is no such soul-theory, and any soul-theory, whatever it may be, however subtle and sublime, is false and imaginary, creating all kinds of problems, producing in its train grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, tribulation, and trouble.

Continuing the discourse, the *Buddha* said: “O *Bhikkhus*, when neither Self nor anything pertaining to Self can truly and really be found, this speculative view: ‘The universe is that *ātman* (Soul); I shall be that after death, permanent, abiding, everlasting, unchanging, and I shall exist as such for eternity’ — is it not wholly and completely foolish?”<sup>121</sup>

Here, the *Buddha* explicitly states that an *ātman*, or Soul, or Self, is nowhere to be found in reality, and it is foolish to believe that there is such a thing.

Those who seek a Self in the *Buddha*’s Teaching quote a few examples which they first translate wrongly and then misinterpret. One of them is the well-known line *Attā hi attano nātho* from the *Dhammapada* (XII, verse 160), which has been translated as: “Self is the lord of self”, and then interpreted to mean that the big “Self” is the lord of the small “self”.

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<sup>121</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.



First of all, this translation is incorrect. *Attā* here does not mean “self” in the sense of “soul”. In Pāli, the word “*attā*” is generally used as a reflexive or indefinite pronoun, except in a few cases where it specifically and philosophically refers to the Soul-Theory, as we have seen above. But in general usage, as in the chapter in the *Dhammapada* where this line occurs, and in many other places, it is used as a reflexive or indefinite pronoun meaning “myself”, “yourself”, “himself”, “one”, “oneself”, etc.

Next, the word “*nātho*” does not mean “lord”, but “protection”, “refuge”, “help”, “support”. Therefore, *Attā hi attano nātho* really means: “You alone are your own refuge”, “One is one’s own refuge”, or “One is one’s own help or support”. It has nothing to do with any metaphysical “Soul” or “Self”. It simply means that you have to rely on yourself and not on others.

Another example of the attempt to introduce the idea of Self into the *Buddha*’s Teaching is in the well-known words *Attadīpā viharatha, attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā*, which are taken out of context in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta.<sup>122</sup> This phrase literally means: “Dwell making yourselves your island [support], making yourselves your refuge, and not anyone else as your refuge.” Those who wish to see a Self in Buddhism interpret the words *attadīpā* and *attasaraṇā* “taking self as a lamp”, “taking self as a refuge”.

We cannot understand the full meaning and significance of the advice of the *Buddha* to Ānanda, unless we take into consideration the background and the context in which these words were spoken.

According to the account, the *Buddha* was staying at a village called Beluva. It was just three months before His death, His *parinibbāna*. At the time, the *Buddha* was eighty years old, and He was suffering from a very serious illness, almost at the point of death (*māraṇantika*). But He thought it was not proper for Him to die without breaking the news to His disciples who were near and dear to Him. Therefore, with courage and determination, He bore all His pains, got the better of His illness, and recovered. But His health was still poor. After His recovery, He was seated one day in the shade outside His residence. Ānanda, the most devoted attendant of the *Buddha*, went to his beloved Master, sat near Him, and said: “Sir, I have looked after the health of the Blessed One, I have looked after Him in His illness. But at the sight of the illness of the Blessed One, the horizon became dim to me, and my faculties were no longer clear. Yet, there was one little consolation: I thought that the Blessed One would not pass away until He had left instructions regarding the Order of the *Sangha*.”

Then, the *Buddha*, full of compassion and human feeling, gently spoke to His devoted and beloved attendant: “Ānanda, what does the Order of the *Sangha* expect from Me? I have taught the Truth (*Dhamma*) without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine. With regard to the Truth, the *Tathāgata* has nothing like the closed fist of a teacher (*ācariya-muṭṭhi*) [who hides things from his disciples]. Surely, Ānanda, if there is anyone who thinks that he will lead the *Sangha*, and that the *Sangha* should depend on him, let him set down his instructions. But the *Tathāgata* has no such idea. Why should He then leave instructions concerning the *Sangha*? I am now old, Ānanda — eighty years old. As a worn-out cart has to be kept going by repairs, so, it seems to Me, the body of the *Tathāgata* can only be kept going by repairs. Therefore, Ānanda,

<sup>122</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* II, no. 16.

*dwell making yourselves your island [support], making yourselves, not anyone else, your refuge; making the Dhamma your island [support], the Dhamma your refuge, nothing else your refuge.*”<sup>123</sup>

What the *Buddha* wanted to convey to Ānanda is quite clear. The latter was sad and depressed. He thought that they would all be lonely, helpless, without a refuge, without a leader after their great Teacher’s death. So the *Buddha* gave him consolation, courage, and confidence, saying that they should depend on themselves and on the *Dhamma* He taught, and not on anyone else, or on anything else. Here, the question of a metaphysical *ātman*, or Self, is quite beside the point.

Further, the *Buddha* explained to Ānanda how one could be one’s own island or refuge, how one could make the *Dhamma* one’s own island or refuge — through the cultivation of mindfulness or awareness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), sensations or feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), the state of the mind (*cittānupassanā*), and mind objects or the contents of the mind (*dhammānupassanā*) (the four Foundations of Mindfulness [*satipaṭṭhāna*]). There is no talk at all here about an *ātman* or Self.

Another reference, oft-quoted, is used by those who try to find an *ātman* in the *Buddha*’s Teaching. The *Buddha* was once seated under a tree in a forest on the way to Uruvelā from Benares. On that day, thirty friends, all of them young princes, went out on a picnic with their young wives into the same forest. One of the princes, who was unmarried, brought a prostitute with him. While the others were amusing themselves, she stole some objects of value from them and disappeared. While searching for her in the forest, they saw the *Buddha* seated under a tree and asked Him whether He had seen a woman. He enquired what the problem was. When they explained, the *Buddha* asked them: “What do you think, young men? Which is better for you? To search after a woman or to search after yourselves?”<sup>124</sup>

Here again, it is a simple and natural question, and there is no justification for introducing far-fetched ideas of a metaphysical *ātman* or Self into the matter. The princes answered that it was better for them to search after themselves. The *Buddha* then asked them to sit down, and He explained the *Dhamma* to them. In the available account, in the original text of what He said to them, not a word is mentioned about an *ātman*.

Much has been written on the subject of the *Buddha*’s silence when a certain *parivrājaka* (“Wanderer”) named Vacchagotta asked Him whether there was an *ātman* or not. The story is as follows:

Vacchagotta came to the *Buddha* and asked:

“Venerable Gotama, is there a Self (*ātman*)?”

The *Buddha* was silent.

“Then, Venerable Gotama, is there no Self?”

Again, the *Buddha* was silent.

Whereupon, Vacchagotta got up and went away.

After Vacchagotta had left, Ānanda asked the *Buddha* why He did not answer Vacchagotta’s questions. The *Buddha* explained His position thus:

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<sup>123</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* II, no. 16. Only the last sentence is translated exactly as spoken by the *Buddha*. The rest of the account is an abbreviated version of what is contained in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.

<sup>124</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Mahāvagga*.

“Ānanda, when Vacchagotta asked: ‘Is there a Self?’, if I had answered: ‘There is a Self’, then, Ānanda, that would be siding with those recluses and *brāhmaṇas* who hold the eternalist point of view (*sassata-vāda*).

“And, Ānanda, when Vacchagotta asked: ‘Is there no Self?’ if I had answered: ‘There is no Self’, then, that would be siding with those recluses and *brāhmaṇas* who hold the annihilationist point of view (*uccheda-vāda*).<sup>125</sup>

“Again, Ānanda, when Vacchagotta asked: ‘Is there a Self?’, if I had answered: ‘There is a Self’, would that be in accordance with My knowledge that all *dharmas* are without self?”<sup>126</sup>

“Surely not, Sir.”

“Again, Ānanda, when Vacchagotta asked: ‘Is there no Self?’, if I had answered: ‘There is no Self’, then, that would have been a greater confusion to the already confused Vacchagotta. For he would have thought: ‘Formerly, indeed, I had a Self (*ātman*), but now I do not have one’.”<sup>127</sup>

It should now be quite clear why the *Buddha* was silent. But it will be still clearer if we take into consideration the whole background and the way in which the *Buddha* treated questions and questioners — which has been altogether ignored by those who have discussed this problem.

The *Buddha* was not like a computer, simply answering whatever questions were put to Him by anyone at all, without any consideration. He was a practical Teacher, full of compassion and wisdom. He did not answer questions to show His knowledge and intelligence, but to help the questioner on the way to realization. He always spoke to people bearing in mind their level of development, their tendencies, their mental make-up, their character, and their capacity to understand a particular question.<sup>128</sup>

According to the *Buddha*, there are four ways of dealing with questions: (1) some should be answered directly; (2) others should be answered by way of analyzing them; (3) still others should be answered by counter-questions; and (4) some should be put aside.<sup>129</sup>

There may be several ways of putting aside a question. One way is to say that a particular question cannot be answered or explained, as the *Buddha* had told this very same Vacchagotta on more than one occasion, when those famous questions whether the universe is eternal or not, etc., were put to Him.<sup>130</sup> This is the way He had replied to the

<sup>125</sup> On another occasion, the *Buddha* told this same Vacchagotta that the *Tathāgata* had no theories, because He had seen the true nature of things (*Majjhima Nikāya* I). Here, too, the *Buddha* did not want to associate Himself with any theories.

<sup>126</sup> *Sabbe dhammā anattā*. These are exactly the same words found in the *Dhammapada*, verse 279, which we discussed above.

<sup>127</sup> In fact, on another occasion (*Majjhima Nikāya* I), evidently earlier, when the *Buddha* had explained a certain deep and subtle question — the question as to what happened to an *Arahant* after death —, Vacchagotta said: “Venerable Gotama, here, I fall into ignorance, I get into confusion. Whatever little faith I had at the beginning of this conversation with the Venerable Gotama, that, too, is gone now.” So, it is easy to understand why the *Buddha* would not want to confuse Vacchagotta again by discussing things that were beyond his comprehension.

<sup>128</sup> This ability of the *Buddha* is called “*indriyaparopariyattañāṇa*” (*Majjhima Nikāya* I; *Vibhanga*).

<sup>129</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*.

<sup>130</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* IV; *Majjhima Nikāya* I; etc.

same questions when asked by Mālunkyaputta and others. But He could not use the same approach with regard to the question whether there is a Self (*ātman*) or not, because He had always discussed and explained it. Here, He could not say “there is a Self”, because it is contrary to His knowledge that “all *dhammas* are without self”. Then, He did not want to say “there is no Self”, because that would unnecessarily and without any purpose have confused and disturbed poor Vacchagotta, who was already confused by a similar question, as he had himself admitted earlier. Vacchagotta was not yet in a position to understand the idea of *anattā*. Therefore, to put aside this question by silence was the wisest thing in this particular case.

We must not forget, too, that the *Buddha* had known Vacchagotta quite well for a long time. This was not the first occasion on which this inquiring Wanderer had come to see Him. The wise and compassionate Teacher gave much thought and showed great consideration for this confused seeker. There are many references in the Pāli texts to this same Vacchagotta the Wanderer, his going round quite often to see the *Buddha* and His disciples and asking the same kinds of question again and again, evidently very much worried, almost obsessed by these problems.<sup>131</sup> The *Buddha*’s silence seems to have had a much more profound effect on Vacchagotta than any eloquent answer or discussion.<sup>132</sup>

There are those who take “Self” to mean what is generally known as “mind” or “consciousness”. But the *Buddha* says that it is better for a man to take his physical body as Self rather than mind, thought, or consciousness, because the former seems to be more solid than the later, while mind, thought, or consciousness (*citta*, *mano*, *viññāṇa*) changes constantly day and night even faster than the body (*kāya*).<sup>133</sup>

It is the vague feeling of “I AM” that creates the idea of Self, which has no corresponding reality. To see this truth is to realize *nibbāna*, which is not very easy. In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, there is an enlightening conversation on this point between a *Bhikkhu* named Khemaka and a group of *Bhikkhus*.

These *Bhikkhus* ask Khemaka whether he sees in the Five Aggregates a Self or anything pertaining to a Self. Khemaka replies “No”. Then, the *Bhikkhus* say that, if so, he should be an *Arahant*, free from all impurities. But Khemaka confesses that, though he does not find in the Five Aggregates a Self, or anything pertaining to a Self, “I am not an *Arahant*, free from all impurities. O friends, with regard to the Five Aggregates of Attachment, I have a feeling ‘I AM’, but I do not clearly see ‘This is I AM’.” Then, Khemaka explains that what he calls “I AM” is neither matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, nor consciousness, nor anything without them. But he has the feeling

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<sup>131</sup> See, for example, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III and IV; *Majjhima Nikāya* I; *Anguttara Nikāya* V.

<sup>132</sup> For, we find that, after some time, Vacchagotta came again to see the *Buddha*. This time, however, he did not ask any questions as usual but said: “It is long since I had a talk with the Venerable Gotama. It would be good if Venerable Gotama would instruct me on good and bad (*kusalākusalam*) in brief.” The *Buddha* said that He would explain good and bad to him, in brief as well as in detail, and so He did. Eventually, Vacchagotta became a disciple of the *Buddha*, and, following His Teaching, attained Arahantship, realized Truth, realized *nibbāna*, after which the problems of *ātman* and other questions no longer troubled him. (*Majjhima Nikāya* I.)

<sup>133</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II. Some people think that the “store-consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*) or “Buddha-nature” (*Tathāgatagarbha*) of Mahāyāna Buddhism is something like a “Self”. However, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* categorically denies this.

“I AM” with regard to the Five Aggregates, though he could not see clearly “This is I AM”.

He says it is like the smell of a flower — it is neither the smell of the petals, nor of the color, nor of the pollen, but the smell of the flower.

Khemaka further explains that even a person who has attained the early stages of realization still retains this feeling “I AM”. But later on, when he progresses further, this feeling of “I AM” disappears altogether, just as the chemical smell of a freshly washed cloth disappears after a time when it is kept in a box.

This discussion was so useful and enlightening to them that, at the end of it, the text says, all of them, including Khemaka himself, became *Arahants*, free from form all impurities, thus finally getting rid of “I AM”.

According to the *Buddha’s Teaching*, it is as wrong to hold the opinion “I have no Self” (which is the annihilationist theory) as to hold the opinion “I have Self” (which is the eternalist theory), because both are fetters, both arising out of the false idea “I AM”. The correct position with regard to the question of *anattā* is not to take hold of any opinions or views, but to try to see things objectively as they are without mental projections, to see that what we call “I”, or a “being”, is only a combination of physical and mental aggregates, which are working together interdependently in a flux of momentary change within the law of cause and effect, and that there is nothing permanent, everlasting, unchanging, and eternal in the whole of existence.

Here, naturally, a question arises: If there is no *ātman* or Self, who or what receives the results of *kamma* (“actions”)? No one can answer this question better than the *Buddha* Himself. When this question was raised by a *Bhikkhu*, the *Buddha* said: “I have taught you, O *Bhikkhus*, to see conditionality everywhere in all things.”<sup>134</sup>

The *Buddha’s Teaching* on *anattā*, “No-Soul” or “No-Self”, should not be considered as negative or annihilationist. Like *nibbāna*, it is Truth, Reality; and Reality cannot be negative. It is the false belief in a non-existing imaginary Self that is negative. The Teaching on *anattā* dispels the darkness of false beliefs and produces the light of wisdom. It is not negative. As Asanga very aptly says: “There is the fact of No-Selfness (*nairātmyāstīti*).”<sup>135</sup> ■

<sup>134</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* III; *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.

<sup>135</sup> *Abhidharma Samuccaya*.



# 8

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## Meditation or Mental Culture

The *Buddha* said: “O *Bhikkhus*, there are two kinds of illness. What are those two? Physical illness and mental illness. There seem to be people who enjoy freedom from physical illness even for a year or two... even for a hundred years or more. But, O *Bhikkhus*, rare in this world are those who enjoy freedom from mental illness even for one moment, except those who are free from mental defilements (*kilesa*)” (that is, except *Arahants*).<sup>136</sup>

The *Buddha*’s Teaching, particularly His way of “meditation”, aims at producing a state of perfect mental health, equilibrium, and tranquility. It is unfortunate that hardly any other section of the *Buddha*’s Teaching is so much misunderstood as “meditation”, both by Buddhists and non-Buddhists. The moment the word “meditation” is mentioned, one thinks of an escape from the daily activities of life; assuming a particular posture, like a statue in some cave or cell in a monastery, in some remote place cut off from society; and musing on, or being absorbed in, some kind of mystic or mysterious thought or trance. True Buddhist “meditation” does not mean this kind of escape at all. The *Buddha*’s Teaching on this subject became so wrongly, or so little, understood, that, in later times, the way of “meditation” deteriorated and degenerated into a kind of ritual or ceremony almost technical in its routine.<sup>137</sup> Happily, this trend has since been reversed.

Many people are interested in meditation or *yoga* in order to gain some spiritual or mystic powers like the “third eye”, which others do not possess. Some time ago, there was a Buddhist Nun in India who was trying to develop a power to see through her ears, while she was still in the possession of the “power” of perfect eyesight! This kind of idea is nothing but “spiritual perversion”. It is always a question of desire, craving for power.

The word “meditation” is a very poor English substitute for the original Pāli term “*bhāvanā*”, which means “culture” or “development”, specifically, “mental culture” or “mental development”. The Buddhist practice of *bhāvanā*, properly speaking, is mental development in the fullest sense of the term. It aims at cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as sense desires, hatred, ill-will, indolence, restlessness and worry, wavering or indecisiveness, and cultivating such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will, energy, the analytical faculty, confidence, joy, tranquility, leading finally to the attainment of highest wisdom which sees the nature of things as they are, and realizes the Ultimate Truth, *nibbāna*.

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<sup>136</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*.

<sup>137</sup> *The Yogāvacara’s Manual*, a text on meditation written in Śri Lanka probably in the 18th century CE, shows how meditation at the time had degenerated into a ritual of reciting formulas, burning candles, etc.

There are two forms of meditation in Buddhism. One is concerned with the development of mental concentration (*samatha* or *samādhi*), of one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*), by various methods described in the texts, leading up to the highest states of meditative absorption (*jhāna*) such as “the Sphere of Nothingness” or “the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception”. According to the *Buddha*, all these states are mind-created, mind-produced, conditioned (*saṃkhata*). They have nothing to do with Reality, Truth, *nibbāna*. This form of meditation existed before the *Buddha*.

Hence, even though this form of meditation is not purely Buddhist, it is included within the field of Buddhist meditation. However, it is not essential for the realization of *nibbāna*. The *Buddha* Himself, before His Enlightenment, studied these meditation practices under different teachers and attained to the highest states of meditative absorption; but He was not satisfied with them, because they did not lead to complete liberation, they did not give insight into Ultimate Reality. He considered these states only as “happy living in this existence” (*diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra*), or “peaceful living” (*santavihāra*), and nothing more.<sup>138</sup>

Therefore, He developed and taught the other form of “meditation”, technically known as “*vipassanā*” (Sanskrit *vipaśyanā* or *vidarśanā*), “Insight” into the nature of things, leading to the complete liberation of mind, to the realization of the Ultimate Truth, *nibbāna*. This is essentially Buddhist “meditation”, Buddhist “mental culture”. It is an analytical method based upon mindfulness, awareness, vigilance, observation.

It is impossible to do justice to such a vast subject in a few pages.<sup>139</sup> However, an attempt is made here to give a very brief and rough idea of Buddhist “meditation”, “mental culture” or “mental development”, in a practical way.

The most important discourse ever given by the *Buddha* on mental development (“meditation”) is called the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (“The Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness”) (*sutta* no. 22 of the *Dīgha Nikāya* or no.10 of the *Majjhima Nikāya*). This discourse is so highly venerated in Theravādin Buddhist tradition that it is regularly recited not only in Buddhist monasteries, but also in Buddhist homes with members of the family sitting round and listening with deep devotion. Very often, *Bhikkhus* recite this *sutta* by the bed-side of a dying man in order to purify his last thoughts.

The methods of “meditation” given in this discourse are not cut off from life, nor do they avoid life; on the contrary, they are all connected with our life, our daily activities, our sorrows and joys, our words and thoughts, our moral and intellectual occupations. The discourse is divided into four main sections: (1) the first section deals with our body (*kāya*); (2) the second with our feelings and sensations (*vedanā*); (3) the third with the state of our mind (*citta*); and (4) the fourth with the contents of our mind, that is, with various moral and intellectual subjects (*dhamma*).

It should be clearly borne in mind that, whatever the form of “meditation” may be, the essential thing is mindfulness or awareness (*sati*), attention or observation (*anupassanā*).

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<sup>138</sup> See the Sallekha Sutta (no. 8) of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

<sup>139</sup> Buddhist meditation is discussed in detail in the *Visuddhimagga* (*The Path of Purification*) by Buddhaghosa Thera (Seattle, WA: BPS Pariyatti Editions [1999]) and in *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice* by Paravahera Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society [1987]).



One of the most well-known, popular, and practical examples of “meditation” connected with the body is called “The Mindfulness or Awareness of In-and-Out Breathing” (*ānāpānasati*). It is for this “meditation” only that a particular and definite posture is prescribed in the text. For other forms of “meditation” given in this *sutta*, one may sit, stand, or walk, as one likes.<sup>140</sup> But, for cultivating mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, one should sit, according to the text, “cross-legged, keeping the body erect and mindfulness alert”. But sitting cross-legged is not practical and easy for people of all countries, particularly for Westerners. Therefore, those who find it difficult to sit cross-legged, may sit on a chair, “keeping the body erect and mindfulness alert”. It is very necessary for this exercise that the meditator should sit erect, but not stiff; his hands placed comfortably on his lap. Thus seated, you may close your eyes, or you may gaze at the tip of your nose, whichever is most convenient for you.

The following diagram illustrates the recommended postures:



You breathe in and out all day and night, but you are never mindful of it, you never for a second concentrate your mind on it. Now, you are going to do just this. Breathe in and out as usual, without any effort or strain. Next, bring your mind to concentrate on your breathing in and out; let your mind watch and observe your breathing in and out; let your mind be aware and vigilant of your breathing in and out. When you breathe, you sometimes take deep breaths, sometimes not. This does not matter at all. Breathe normally and naturally. The only thing is that, when you take deep breaths, you should be aware that they are deep breaths, and so on. In other words, your mind should be so fully concentrated on your breathing that you are aware of its movements and changes. Forget all other things — your surroundings, your environment. Do not raise your eyes and look at anything. Try to do this for ten or fifteen minutes.

<sup>140</sup> One may also lie down when practicing other forms of meditation, especially if one is disabled or bed-ridden. In general, however, the body should be kept erect and mindfulness alert for optimal results in all forms of meditation.

At the beginning, you will find it extremely difficult to bring your mind to concentrate on your breathing. You will be astonished how your mind runs away. It does not stay. You begin to think of various things. You hear sounds outside. Your mind is disturbed and distracted. You may be dismayed and disappointed. But if you continue to practice this exercise twice daily, morning and evening, for about ten or fifteen minutes at a time, you will gradually, by and by, begin to concentrate your mind on your breathing. After a certain period, you will experience just that split second when your mind is fully concentrated on your breathing, when you will not hear even sounds nearby, when no external world exists for you. This slight moment is such a tremendous experience for you, full of joy, happiness, and tranquility, that you would like to continue it. But still, you cannot. Yet, if you go on practicing this regularly, you will find that you are able to repeat the experience again and again for longer and longer periods. That is the moment when you lose yourself completely in your mindfulness of breathing. As long as you are conscious of yourself, you can never concentrate on anything else. But, the more you surrender yourself, the more effortless concentration becomes.

This exercise of mindfulness of breathing, which is one of the simplest and easiest practices, is meant to develop concentration leading up to very high states of meditative absorption. Besides, the power of concentration is essential for any kind of deep understanding, penetration, insight into the nature of things, including the realization of *nibbāna*. Apart from all this, this exercise on breathing gives you immediate results. It is good for your physical health, for relaxation, sound sleep, and for efficiency in your daily life and work. It makes you calm and tranquil. Even at moments when you are nervous or excited, if you practice this for a couple of minutes, you will see for yourself that you become immediately quiet and at peace. You feel as though you have awakened after a good rest.

Another very important, practical, and useful form of “meditation” or “mental development” is to be aware and mindful of whatever you are doing, physically or verbally, during your regular daily activities. Whether you walk, stand, sit, lie down, or sleep, whether you stretch or bend your limbs, whether you look around, whether you put on your clothes, whether you talk or keep silent, whether you eat or drink, even whether you answer the calls of nature — in these and all other activities, you should be fully aware and mindful of the act you are performing at the moment. That is to say, that you should live in the present moment, in the present action. This does not mean that you should not think of the past or the future at all. On the contrary, you may think of them in relation to the present moment, the present action, when and where it is relevant.

People do not generally live in their actions, in the present moment. They live in the past or in the future. Though they seem to be doing something here and now, they live somewhere else in their thoughts, in their imaginary problems and worries, usually in the memories of the past or in desires and speculations about the future. Therefore, they do not live in, nor do they enjoy, what they do at the moment. So they are unhappy and discontented with the present moment, with the work at hand, and, naturally, they cannot give themselves fully to what they appear to be doing.

Sometimes, you will see a man or a woman in a restaurant reading while eating — a relatively common sight. They give the impression of being very busy people, with no time even for eating. You wonder whether they are eating or reading. One may say that

they are doing both. In fact, they are doing neither, they are enjoying neither. They are strained and disturbed in mind, they do not enjoy what they are doing at the moment, and they are not living their life in the present moment. Instead, they are unconsciously and foolishly trying to escape from life. (This does not mean, however, that one should not talk with a friend while having lunch or dinner.)

You cannot escape life however you may try. As long as you live, whether in a town or in a cave, you have to face it and live it. Real life is the present moment — not the memories of the past, which is dead and gone, nor the dreams of the future, which is not yet born. Those who live in the present moment live the real life, and they are the happiest of people.

When asked why His disciples, who lived a simple and quiet life with only one meal a day, were so radiant, the *Buddha* replied: “They do not regret the past, nor do they brood over the future. They live in the present. Therefore, they are radiant. By brooding over the future and regretting the past, fools dry up like green reeds cut down [in the sun].”<sup>141</sup>

Mindfulness or awareness does not mean that you should think and be conscious “I am doing this” or “I am doing that”. No — just the contrary. The moment you think “I am doing this”, you become self-conscious and are not living in the action. Instead, you are living in the idea “I am”, and, consequently, your effort is wasted. You should forget yourself completely, and lose yourself in what you are doing, when you are doing it. The moment a speaker becomes self-conscious and thinks “I am addressing an audience”, his speech is disturbed, and his train of thought is broken. But when he forgets himself in his speech, in his subject, then, he is at his best, he speaks well, and he explains things clearly. All great work — artistic, poetic, intellectual, or spiritual — is produced at those moments when its creators are lost completely in their actions, when they forget themselves altogether, and when they are free from self-consciousness.

This mindfulness or awareness with regard to our activities, taught by the *Buddha*, is to live in the present moment, to live in the present action. (This is also the Zen way, which is based primarily on this teaching.) Here, in this form of meditation, you do not have to perform any particular action in order to develop mindfulness, but you have only to be mindful and aware of whatever you may be doing. You do not have to spend one second of your precious time on this particular “meditation” — you have only to cultivate mindfulness and awareness always, day and night, with regard to all activities in your usual daily life. These two forms of “meditation” discussed above are connected with our body.

Next, there is a way of practicing mental development (“meditation”) with regard to all our sensations or feelings, whether happy, unhappy, or neutral. Let us take only one example. You experience an unhappy, sorrowful sensation. In this state, your mind is cloudy, hazy, not clear — it is depressed. In some cases, you do not even see clearly why you have that unhappy feeling. First of all, you should learn not to be unhappy about your unhappy feeling, not to be worried about your worries. But try to see clearly why there is a sensation or a feeling of unhappiness, or worry, or sorrow. Try to examine how it arises (its cause) and how it disappears (its cessation). Try to examine it as if you

<sup>141</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* I.

are observing it from outside, without any subjective reaction, as a scientist observes some object. Here, too, you should not look at it as “my feeling” or “my sensation”, subjectively, but only look at it as “a feeling” or “a sensation”, objectively. You should forget again the false idea of “I”. When you see its nature, how it arises and disappears, your mind grows dispassionate towards that sensation and becomes detached and free. It is the same with regard to all sensations or feelings.

Now, let us discuss the form of “meditation” with regard to our minds. You should be fully aware of the state of your mind whenever it is passionate or detached, whenever it is overpowered by hatred, ill-will, or jealousy, whenever it is full of love or compassion, whenever it is deluded or has a clear and right understanding, and so on and so forth. We must admit that, very often, we are afraid or ashamed to look at our own minds. So we prefer to avoid doing it. One should be bold and sincere and look at one’s own mind as one looks at one’s face in a mirror.<sup>142</sup>

Here, there is no attitude of criticizing or judging, or discriminating between right and wrong or good and bad. It is simply a matter of observing, watching, examining. You are not a judge, but an impartial observer. When you watch your mind and see its true nature clearly, you become dispassionate with regard to its emotions, sentiments, and states. Thus, you become detached and free, so that you may see things as they are.

Let us take one example. Say you are really angry, overpowered by anger, ill-will, hatred. It is curious, and paradoxical, that the man who is angry is not really aware, not mindful, that he is angry. The moment he becomes aware and mindful of that state of his mind, the moment he sees his anger, the anger begins to subside. You should examine its nature, how it arises, how it disappears. Here again, it should be remembered that you should not think “I am angry” or think of it as “my anger”. You should only be aware and mindful of the state of an angry mind. You are only observing and examining an angry mind objectively. This should be the attitude with regard to all sentiments, emotions, and states of mind.

Then, there is a form of “meditation” on ethical, spiritual, and intellectual subjects. All our studies, reading, discussions, conversations, and deliberations on such subjects are included in this “meditation”. To read this book, and to think deeply about the subjects discussed in it, is a form of meditation. We have seen earlier that the conversation between Khemaka and the group of Monks was a form of meditation which led to the realization of *nibbāna*.

So, according to this form of meditation, you may study, think, and deliberate on a topic such as the Five Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), namely:

1. Desire for gratification of the senses (*kāmacchanda*);
2. Ill-will, hatred, or anger (*vyāpāda*);
3. Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*);
4. Restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*);
5. Skeptical doubts or indecisiveness (*vicikicchā*).

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<sup>142</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

These five are considered as hindrances to any kind of clear understanding, as a matter of fact, to any kind of progress. When one is overpowered by them and when one does not know how to get rid of them, then, one cannot understand right and wrong or good and bad.

One may also “meditate” on the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhanga*). They are:

1. Mindfulness (*sati*): That is, to be aware and mindful in all our activities and movements, both physical and mental, as we discussed above.
2. Investigation and research into the various problems of doctrine (*dhamma-vicaya*): Included here are all our religious, ethical, and philosophical studies, reading, researches, discussions, conversations, even attending lectures relating to such doctrinal subjects.
3. Energy (*virīya*): To work with determination until the end.
4. Joy or excitement (*pīti*): The quality quite contrary to the pessimistic, gloomy, or melancholic attitude of mind.
5. Relaxation (*passaddhi*): This pertains to both body and mind. We should not be stiff physically or mentally.
6. Concentration (*samādhi*): as discussed above.
7. Equanimity (*upekkhā*): That is, to be able to face life in all its vicissitudes with calmness of mind, with tranquility, without disturbance.

To cultivate these qualities, the most essential thing is a genuine wish, will, or inclination. Many other material and spiritual conditions conducive to the development of each quality are described in the texts.

One may also “meditate” on such subjects as the Five Aggregates, investigating the question “What is a being?” or “What is it that is called I?”, or on the Four Noble Truths, as discussed above. Study and investigation of those subjects constitute this fourth form of meditation, which leads to the realization of Ultimate Truth.

Apart from those we have discussed here, there are many other subjects of meditation, traditionally forty in number, among which mention should be made, particularly, of the four Sublime States (*brahamavihāra*): (1) extending unlimited, universal loving-kindness (*mettā*) and good-will to all living beings without any kind of discrimination, “just as a mother loves her only child”; (2) compassion (*karuṇā*) for all living beings who are suffering, who are in trouble and affliction; (3) sympathetic joy (*muditā*) in the success, welfare, and happiness of others; and (4) equanimity (*upekkhā*) in all vicissitudes of life. ■



# 9

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## What the Buddha Taught And the World Today

There are those who believe that Buddhism is so lofty and sublime a system that it cannot be practiced by ordinary men and women in this everyday world of ours and that one has to retire from it to a monastery, or to some quiet place, if one desires to be a true Buddhist.

This is a sad misconception, due evidently to a lack of understanding of the Teaching of the *Buddha*. People may arrive at such hasty and wrong conclusions as a result of hearing, or reading casually, something about Buddhism written by those, who, since they have not understood the subject in all its aspects, give only a partial and lopsided view of it. The *Buddha's* Teaching is meant not only for Monks and Nuns in monasteries, but also for ordinary men and women living at home with their families. The Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Buddhist way of life, is meant for all, without distinction of any kind.

The vast majority of people in the world cannot become Monks or Nuns, or retire into caves or forests. However noble and pure Buddhism may be, it would be useless to the majority of mankind if they could not follow it in their daily life in the modern world. But, if you understand the spirit of Buddhism correctly (and not only its letter), you can surely follow and practice it while living the life of an ordinary man or woman.

There may be some who find it easier and more convenient to accept Buddhism if they do live in a secluded place, cut off from the society of others. Others may find that this kind of isolation dulls and depresses their whole being, both physically and mentally, and that it may not, therefore, be conducive to the development of their spiritual and intellectual life.

True renunciation (*nekkhamma*) does not mean running away physically from the world. Sāriputta, the chief disciple of the *Buddha*, said that one man might live in a forest devoting himself to ascetic practices but might be full of impure thoughts and “defilements”; another might live in a village or a town, practicing no ascetic discipline, but his mind might be pure and free from “defilements”. Of these two, said Sāriputta, the one who lives a pure life in the village or town is definitely far superior to, and greater than, the one who lives in the forest.<sup>143</sup>

The belief that to follow the *Buddha's* Teaching one has to retire from life is a misconception. It is really an unconscious defense against practicing it. There are

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<sup>143</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.

numerous references in Buddhist literature to men and women living ordinary, normal family lives who successfully practiced what the *Buddha* taught and realized *nibbāna*. Vacchagotta the Wanderer (whom we met earlier in the chapter on No-Soul), once asked the *Buddha* directly whether there were lay men and women leading the family life, who followed His Teaching successfully and attained to high spiritual states. The *Buddha* categorically stated that there were not one or two, not a hundred or two hundred or five hundred, but many more lay men and women leading the family life who followed His Teaching successfully and attained to high spiritual states.<sup>144</sup>

It may be agreeable for certain people to live a secluded life in a quiet place away from noise and disturbance. But it is certainly more praiseworthy and courageous to practice Buddhism living among our fellow beings, helping them and being of service to them. It may, perhaps, be useful in some cases for a man to live in seclusion for a time, as a preliminary moral, spiritual, and intellectual training, in order to improve his mind and character, thus making himself strong enough to come out of seclusion later and help others. But, if a man lives all his life in solitude, thinking only of his own happiness and liberation, without caring for his fellow beings, this surely is not in keeping with the *Buddha's* Teaching, which is based on love, compassion, and service to others.

One might now ask: If one can follow Buddhism while living the life of an ordinary lay person, why was the *Sangha*, the Order of Monks and Nuns, established by the *Buddha*? The Order provides opportunity for those who are willing to devote their whole lives not only to their own spiritual and intellectual development, but also to the service of others. Ordinary lay persons with a family cannot be expected to devote their whole life to the service of others, while Monks and Nuns, who have no family responsibilities or any other worldly ties, are in a position to devote their whole life “for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many” according to the *Buddha's* advice. That is how, in the course of history, the Buddhist monastery became not only a spiritual center, but also a center of learning and culture.

The Sigāla Sutta (no. 31 of the *Dīgha Nikāya*) shows with what great respect the lay person's life, family, and social relations are regarded by the *Buddha*. A young man named Sigāla used to worship the six cardinal points of the heavens — east, south, west, north, nadir, and zenith — in obeying and observing the last advice given to him by his dying father. The *Buddha* told the young man that, in the “noble discipline” (*ariyassa vinaye*) of His Teaching, the six directions were different. According to the *Buddha's* “noble discipline”, the six directions were reinterpreted as follows: (1) east is parents; (2) south is teachers; (3) west is wife and children; (4) north is friends, relatives, and neighbors; (5) nadir is servants, workers, and employees; and (6) zenith is holy ones.

“One should worship these six directions” said the *Buddha*. Here, it is significant that the *Buddha* used the word “worship” (*namasseyya*), for one “worships” something sacred, something worthy of honor and respect. These six family and social groups mentioned above are treated in Buddhism as sacred, worthy of respect and worship. But how is one to “worship” them? The *Buddha* says that one should “worship” them by performing one's duties towards them. These duties are explained in His discourse to Sigāla.

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<sup>144</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I.



First: Parents are sacred to their children. The *Buddha* says: “Parents are called ‘*brahma*’ (*brahmāti mātāpitara*).” The term “*brahma*” denotes the highest and most sacred conception in Indian thought, and in it, the *Buddha* includes parents. So, in good Buddhist families at the present time, children literally “worship” their parents every day, morning and evening. They have to perform certain duties towards their parents according to the “noble discipline”: (1) they should look after their parents in their old age; (2) should do whatever they have to do on their behalf; (3) should maintain the honor of the family and continue the family tradition; (4) should protect the wealth earned by their parents; and (5) perform their funeral rites after their death. Parents, in their turn, have certain responsibilities towards their children: (1) they should keep their children away from evil ways; (2) should engage them in good and profitable activities; (3) should give them a good education; (4) should marry them into good families; and (5) should hand over the property to them in due course.

Second: The relationship between teacher and pupil. A pupil (1) should respect and be obedient to his teacher; (2) should attend to his teacher’s needs, if any; and (3) should study earnestly. And the teacher, in his turn, (1) should train and shape his pupil properly; (2) should teach him well; (3) should introduce him to his friends; and (4) should try to procure him security or employment when his education is over.

Third: The relation between husband and wife — love between husband and wife is considered almost religious or sacred. It is called *sadāra-brahmacariya* “sacred family life”. Here too, the significance of the term “*brahma*” should be noted — the highest reverence is given to the relationship between husband and wife. Wives and husbands should be faithful, respectful, and devoted to each other, and they have certain duties towards each other: (1) the husband should always honor his wife and never be lacking in respect towards her; (2) should love her and be faithful to her; (3) should secure her position and comfort; and (4) should please her by presenting her with clothing and jewelry. (The fact that the *Buddha* did not forget to mention even such a thing as the gifts a husband should make to his wife shows how understanding and sympathetic were His humane feelings towards ordinary human emotions.) The wife, in her turn, should (1) supervise and look after household affairs; (2) should entertain guests, visitors, friends, relatives, servants, and employees; (3) should love and be faithful to her husband; (4) should protect her husband’s earnings; and (5) should be clever and energetic in all activities.

Fourth: The relation between friends, relatives, and neighbors: (1) they should be hospitable and charitable to one another; (2) should speak pleasantly and agreeably to each other; (3) should work for each other’s welfare; (4) should be on equal terms with one another; (5) should not quarrel among themselves; (6) should help each other when in need; and (7) should not abandon each other when difficulties arise.

Fifth: The relation between master and servant. The master or the employer has several obligations towards his servants or his employees: (1) work should be assigned according to ability and capacity; (2) adequate wages should be paid; (3) medical needs should be provided; and (4) occasional donations or bonuses should be granted. The servant or employee, in his turn, should be: (1) hardworking and not lazy; (2) honest and obedient and not cheat his master or employer; and (3) should be meticulous in his work.

Sixth: The relation between holy ones (that is, recluses and *brāhmaṇas*) and lay people. Lay people should look after the material needs of holy ones with love and respect, while the holy ones should, with a loving heart, impart knowledge and learning to lay people and lead them along the good path away from evil.

We see, then, that the lay life, with its family and social obligations, is included in the “noble discipline” and is within the framework of the Buddhist way of life, as the *Buddha* envisaged it.

Thus, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, one of the oldest Pāli texts, Sakka, the king of the gods (*devas*), declares that he worships not only the Monks who live a virtuous holy life, but also “lay disciples (*upāsaka*) who perform meritorious deeds, who are virtuous, and who maintain their families righteously”.

If one desires to become a Buddhist, there is no formal initiation ceremony (such as a baptism) which one has to undergo. (But, to become a *Bhikkhu* or a *Bhikkhunī*, a member of the Order of the *Sangha*, one has to undergo a long process of disciplinary training and education.) If one understands the *Buddha*’s Teaching, if one is convinced that His Teaching is the right Path, and if one tries to follow it, then, one is a Buddhist. But, according to the unbroken age-old tradition in Buddhist countries, one is considered a Buddhist if one takes the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma* (the Teaching), and the *Sangha* (the Order of Monks and Nuns) — generally called “the Triple-Gem” or “the Three Jewels” — as one’s refuges and undertakes to observe the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*) — the minimum moral obligations of a lay Buddhist: (1) to abstain from taking life; (2) to abstain from taking what is not freely given (stealing); (3) to abstain from sexual misconduct (adultery, rape, seduction); (4) to abstain from false speech, vulgar speech, sarcasm, gossip, and idle chatter; and (5) to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness —, reciting the formulas given in the ancient texts. On religious occasions, Buddhists usually recite these formulas in congregation, following the lead of a Buddhist Monk.

There are no external rites or ceremonies which a Buddhist has to perform. Buddhism is a way of life, and what is essential is following the Noble Eightfold Path. Of course, in all Buddhist countries, there are simple and beautiful ceremonies on religious occasions. There are shrines with statues of the *Buddha*, *stūpas* or pagodas, and *bodhi*-trees in monasteries where Buddhists worship, offer flowers, light lights (candles, lamps, etc.), and burn incense. This should not be likened to prayer in theistic religions; it is only a way of paying homage to the memory of the Master who showed the way. These traditional observances, though not essential, have their value in satisfying the religious emotions and needs of those who are less advanced intellectually and spiritually, and helping them gradually along the Path.

Those who think that Buddhism is interested only in lofty ideals, high moral and philosophical thought, and that it ignores the social and economic welfare of people, are wrong. The *Buddha* was interested in the happiness of mankind. To Him, happiness was not possible without leading a pure life based on moral and spiritual principles. But He knew that leading such a life was difficult in unfavorable material and social conditions.

Buddhism does not consider material welfare as an end in itself. It is only a means to an end — a higher and nobler end. But it is a means which is indispensable in achieving a higher purpose for man’s happiness. Thus, Buddhism recognizes the need of

certain minimum material conditions favorable to spiritual success — even that of Monks and Nuns engaged in meditation in some solitary place.<sup>145</sup>

The *Buddha* did not take life out of the context of its social and economic background. He looked at it as a whole, in all its social, economic, and political aspects. His Teachings on ethical, spiritual, and philosophical problems are fairly well known. But less is known, particularly in the West, about His Teaching on social, economic, and political matters. Yet, there are numerous discourses dealing with these scattered throughout the ancient Buddhist texts. Let us take only a few examples.

The Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (no. 26) clearly states that poverty (*dāliddiya*) is the cause of immorality and crimes such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, cruelty, etc. Kings in ancient times, like governments today, tried to suppress the cause of immorality and crimes through punishment. The Kūṭadanta Sutta of the same *Nikāya* (no. 5) explains how futile this is. It says that this method can never be successful. Instead, the *Buddha* suggests that, in order to eradicate crime, the economic conditions of the people should be improved: (1) grain and other facilities for agriculture should be provided for farmers and cultivators; (2) capital should be provided for traders and those engaged in business; and (3) adequate wages should be paid to those who are employed. When people are thus provided for with opportunities for earning a sufficient income, they will be contented, will have no fear or anxiety, and, consequently, the country will be peaceful and free from crime.<sup>146</sup>

Because of this, the *Buddha* told lay people how important it was to improve their economic condition. This does not mean that He approved of hoarding wealth with desire and attachment, which is against His fundamental Teaching, nor did He approve of each and every means of earning one's livelihood. There are certain trades, like the production and sale of armaments and/or intoxicants, which He condemns as evil means of livelihood, as we saw earlier.

A man named Dīghajānu once visited the *Buddha* and said: “Venerable Sir, we are ordinary lay men, leading the family life with wife and children. Would the Blessed One teach us some doctrines which will be conducive to our happiness in this world and the next.” The *Buddha* tells him that there are four things which are conducive to a man's happiness in this world: (1) he should be skilled, efficient, earnest, and energetic in whatever profession he is engaged, and he should know it well (*uṭṭhāna-sampadā*); (2) he should protect his income, which he has thus earned righteously, with the sweat of his brow (*ārakkha-sampadā*) (this refers to protecting wealth from thieves, etc. — all these ideas should be considered against the background of the period); (3) he should have good friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*) who are faithful, learned, virtuous, generous, and intelligent, who will help him along the right path, and steer him away from evil; and (4) he should spend reasonably, in proportion to his income, neither too much nor too little; that is, he should not hoard wealth avariciously, nor should he be extravagant; in other words, he should live within his means (*samajīvikatā*).

<sup>145</sup> Buddhist Monks and Nuns, members of the *Sangha*, are not expected to have personal property, but they are allowed to share communal (*sanghika*) property.

<sup>146</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* I.

Then, the *Buddha* expounds the four virtues conducive to a lay person's happiness in the next world: (1) *saddhā*: he should have faith and confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values; (2) *sīla*: he should abstain from destroying and harming life, from stealing and cheating, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from intoxicating drinks; (3) *cāga*: he should practice charity, liberality, and generosity, without attachment and craving for his wealth; and (4) *paññā*: he should develop wisdom which leads to the complete destruction of suffering, to the realization of *nibbāna*.<sup>147</sup>

Sometimes, the *Buddha* even went into details about saving money and spending it, as, for instance, when he told the young man Sigāla that he should spend one fourth of his income on his daily expenses, invest half in his business, and put aside one of fourth for any emergency.<sup>148</sup>

Once, the *Buddha* told Anāthapiṇḍika, the great banker, one of His most devoted lay disciples, who founded the celebrated Jetavana monastery at Sāvattthī for Him, that a lay person, who leads an ordinary family life, has four kinds of happiness. The first happiness is to enjoy economic security or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means (*atthi-sukha*). The second is spending that wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds (*bhoga-sukha*). The third is to be free from debts (*anaṇa-sukha*). The fourth happiness is to live a faultless and a pure life without committing evil in thought, word, or deed (*anavajja-sukha*). It must be noted here that three of these kinds are economic and that the *Buddha* finally reminded Anāthapiṇḍika that economic and material happiness is “not worth one sixteenth part” of the spiritual happiness arising out of a faultless and good life.<sup>149</sup>

From the few examples given above, one could see that the *Buddha* considered economic welfare as a requirement for human happiness, but that he did not recognize progress as real and true if it was only material, devoid of a spiritual and moral foundation. While encouraging material progress, Buddhism always lays great stress on the development of the moral and spiritual character for a happy, peaceful, and contented society.

The *Buddha* was just as clear on politics, on war, and on peace. It is too well known to be repeated here that Buddhism advocates and teaches non-violence and peace as its universal message and does not approve of any kind of violence or destruction of life. According to Buddhism, there is nothing that can be called a “just war”, which is only a false term coined and put into circulation to justify and excuse hatred, cruelty, violence, and massacre. Who decides what is just or unjust? It seems that it is always the mighty and the victorious who are “just”, while the weak and the defeated are “unjust”. “Our war” is always “just”, while “their war” is always “unjust”. Buddhism does not accept this position.

The *Buddha* not only taught non-violence and peace, but He even went to the field of battle itself and intervened personally to prevent a war, as in the case of the dispute between the Sākyas and the Koliyas, who were prepared to fight over the

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<sup>147</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*.

<sup>148</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* III.

<sup>149</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*.

question of which kingdom owned the waters of the river Rohiṇī. On another occasion, His words prevented King Ajātasattu from attacking the country of the Vajjians.

In the days of the *Buddha*, as today, there were rulers who governed their countries unjustly. People were oppressed and exploited, tortured and persecuted, excessive taxes were imposed, and cruel punishments were inflicted. The *Buddha* was deeply moved by these inhumanities. The *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* records that He, therefore, directed His attention to the problem of good government. His views should be appreciated in terms of the social, economic, and political background of His time. He had shown how a whole country could become corrupt, degenerate, and unhappy when the heads of its government, that is, the king or ruler, the ministers, and the administrative officers, become corrupt and unjust. For a country to be happy, it must have a just government. How this form of just government could be realized is explained by the *Buddha* in His Teaching of the “Ten Duties of the King” (*dasa-rāja-dhamma*), as given in the *Jātaka* text.<sup>150</sup>

Of course, the term “king” (*rāja*) of olden times should be replaced today by the term “Government”. “The Ten Duties of the King”, therefore, apply today to all those who constitute the government, such as the head of the state (the monarch, the president, the ruler), the prime minister, cabinet members or ministers, political leaders, legislative and administrative officials, etc.

The first of the “Ten Duties of the King” is liberality, generosity, charity (*dāna*). The ruler or head of state should not have craving and attachment to wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people.

Second: A high moral character (*sīla*). The ruler should never destroy life, cheat, steal, and exploit others, commit adultery, utter falsehood, and take intoxicating drinks. That is, he or she must at least observe the Five Precepts of a lay person.

Third: Sacrificing everything for the good of the people (*pariccāga*), the ruler must be prepared to give up all personal comfort, name and fame, and even his or her life, in the interest of the people.

Fourth: Honesty and integrity (*ajjava*). The ruler must be free from fear or favor in the discharge of his or her duties, must be sincere in his or her intentions, and must not deceive the public.

Fifth: Kindness and gentleness (*maddava*). The ruler must possess a genial temperament.

Sixth: Austerity in habits (*tapa*). The ruler must lead a simple life and should not indulge in a life of luxury. He or she must exercise self-control.

Seventh: Freedom from hatred, ill-will, enmity (*akkodha*). The ruler should bear no grudge against anybody.

Eighth: Non-violence (*avihiṃsā*), which means not only that the ruler should harm no one, but also that he or she should try to promote peace by avoiding and preventing war and everything which involves violence and the destruction of life.

Ninth: Patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding (*khantī*). The ruler must be able to bear hardships, difficulties, and insults without losing his or her temper.

<sup>150</sup> *Jātaka* I, II, III, V.

Tenth: Non-opposition, non-obstruction (*avirodha*), that is to say that the ruler should not oppose the will of the people, should not obstruct any measures that are conducive to the welfare of the people. In other words, he or she should rule in harmony with the people.

If a country is ruled by those endowed with such qualities, it is, needless to say, inevitable that that country will be happy. These were not unrealistic ideals, for there were kings in the past, like Asoka (died ca. 238 BCE) of India, who had established kingdoms based upon these ideals.

The world today lives in constant fear, suspicion, and tension. Science has produced weapons which are capable of unimaginable destruction. Brandishing these new instruments of death, great powers threaten and challenge one another, boasting shamelessly that one could cause more destruction and misery in the world than the other.

They have gone along this path of madness to such a point that, now, if they take one more step forward in that direction, the result will be nothing but mutual annihilation along with the total destruction of humanity.

Human beings, fearful of the situation they have themselves created, want to find a way out and seek some kind of solution. But, there is no viable solution except that held out by the *Buddha*, namely, His message of non-violence and peace, of love and compassion, of tolerance and understanding, of truth and wisdom, of respect and regard for all life, of freedom from selfishness, hatred, and violence.

The *Buddha* says: "Returning hatred with hatred will never bring hatred to an end in this world; only by replacing hatred with love will hatred come to an end. This is an ancient and eternal law."<sup>151</sup>

"Conquer those who are angry through loving-kindness, those who are evil through goodness, those who are greedy through generosity, and those who tell lies through truthfulness."<sup>152</sup>

There can be no peace or happiness for man as long as he desires and craves after conquering and subjugating his neighbor. As the *Buddha* says: "Conquest breeds hatred, for the conquered live in sorrow. Those who are peaceful live happily, having renounced both conquest and defeat."<sup>153</sup> The only conquest that brings peace and happiness is self-conquest. "One who conquers oneself is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield."<sup>154</sup>

One may say that this is all very beautiful, noble, and sublime, but impractical. Yet, is it practical to hate one another? To kill one another? To live in eternal fear and suspicion like wild animals in a jungle? Is this more practical and comfortable? Was hatred ever appeased by hatred? Was evil ever won over by evil? However, there are examples, at least in individual cases, where hatred is appeased by love and kindness, and evil won over by goodness. One will say that this may be true, practicable in individual cases, but that it never works in national and international affairs. People are hypnotized, psychologically puzzled, blinded, manipulated, and deceived by the usage of terms such

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<sup>151</sup> *Dhammapada*, I, verse 5.

<sup>152</sup> *Dhammapada*, XVII, verse 223.

<sup>153</sup> *Dhammapada*, XV, verse 201.

<sup>154</sup> *Dhammapada*, VIII, verse 103.

as “fatherland”, “motherland”, “homeland”, “national security”, “radical Islam”, “state-sponsored or international terrorism”, “communism”, “weapons of mass destruction”, and the like for political and propaganda purposes. A nation is but a vast conglomeration of individuals. A nation or a state does not act — it is the individual who acts. What the individual thinks and does is what the nation or the state thinks and does. What is applicable to the individual is applicable to the nation or the state. If hatred can be appeased by love and kindness on the individual level, surely, it can be realized on the national and international level too. Even in the case of a single person, to meet hatred with kindness, one must have tremendous courage, boldness, faith, and confidence in moral force. May it not be even more so with regard to international affairs? If by the expression “not practical”, one means “not easy”, one is right. Definitely, it is not easy. Yet, it should be tried. One may say it is risky trying it. Surely, it cannot be more risky than trying a nuclear war.

It is consolation and inspiration to think today that at least there was one great ruler, well known in history, who had the courage, the confidence, and the vision to apply this Teaching of non-violence, peace, and love to the administration of a vast empire, in both internal and external affairs. His name was Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India (3rd century BCE) — “the Beloved of the gods”, as he was called. At first, he followed the example of his father (Bindusāra) and grandfather (Chandragupta) and wished to complete the conquest of the Indian peninsula. He invaded and conquered Kalinga and then annexed it. Many hundreds of thousands were killed, wounded, tortured, and taken prisoner in this war. But later, when he became a Buddhist, he was completely changed and transformed by the *Buddha’s* Teaching. In one of his famous Edicts, inscribed on rock (“Rock Edict”, as it is now called), the original of which one may read even today, referring to the conquest of Kalinga, the Emperor publicly expressed his “repentance”, and said how “extremely painful” it was for him to think of that carnage. He publicly declared that he would never draw his sword again for any conquest, but that he “wishes all living beings non-violence, self-control, the practice of serenity and mildness. This, of course, is considered the chief conquest by the ‘Beloved of the gods’ [that is, Asoka], namely, the conquest by piety (*dhmma-vijaya*).” Not only did he renounce war himself, he expressed his desire that “my sons and grandsons will not think of a new conquest as worth achieving... let them think of that conquest only which is the conquest by piety. That is good for this world and the world beyond.”

This is the only example in the history of mankind of a victorious conqueror at the zenith of his power, still possessing the strength to continue his territorial conquests, yet renouncing war and violence and turning to peace and non-violence.

Herein is a lesson for the world today. The ruler of an empire publicly turned his back on war and violence and embraced the message of peace and non-violence. There is no historical evidence to show that any neighboring king took advantage of Asoka’s piety to attack him militarily or that there was any revolt or rebellion within his empire during his lifetime. On the contrary, there was peace throughout the land, and even countries outside his empire seem to have accepted his enlightened leadership.

To talk of maintaining peace through the “balance of power” or “through the threat of nuclear deterrents” is foolish. The might of armaments can only produce fear and not peace. It is impossible that there can be genuine and lasting peace through fear.

Through fear can come only hatred, ill-will, and hostility, suppressed, perhaps, for the time being only, but ready to erupt and become violent at any moment. True and genuine peace can prevail only in an atmosphere of goodwill, honesty, and respect, free from fear, suspicion, and danger.

Buddhism aims at creating a society where the ruinous struggle for power is renounced; where calm and peace prevail, away from conquest and defeat; where the persecution of the innocent is vehemently denounced; where one who conquers oneself is more respected than those who conquer millions by military and economic warfare; where hatred is conquered by kindness, and evil by goodness; where enmity, jealousy, ill-will, and greed do not infect men's minds; where compassion is the driving force of action; where all, including the least of living things, are treated with fairness, consideration, and respect; where life is lived in peace and harmony, in a world of material contentment, and is directed towards the highest and noblest aim, the realization of the Ultimate Truth, *nibbāna*. ■



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# The Dhammapada

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## The Path of the Dhamma

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A NEW RENDERING BY  
Allan R. Bomhard



CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP  
Charleston, SC USA

2013 (2557)

This rendering of the *Dhammapada* was originally completed in October 2007.

In April and May 2008, the entire work was carefully reexamined, and numerous corrections, especially of typographical and punctuation errors, were made. At the same time, refinements were made to the translation of individual verses.

Additional corrections were made in November and December 2011 and in March 2013.

The doctrinal positions expressed in this book are based upon the original teachings (*aggavāda*) of the Buddha.

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# Foreword

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*The Dhammapada*, “The Path of the *Dhamma*,” is so well known that it almost needs no introduction. It is by far the most widely translated Buddhist text. Therefore, I will keep my remarks to a minimum.

*The Dhammapada* is the second book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, which is, itself, the fifth and last collection (*nikāya*) of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. *The Dhammapada* consists of 423 verses spoken by the *Buddha* on various occasions. These verses are arranged according to topic into 26 chapters. Though most of the verses were spoken to *Bhikkhus*, they are, nonetheless, of universal applicability. Indeed, they provide an incomparable guide on how to live a noble, rewarding, and useful life.

In addition to the text of *The Dhammapada*, there also exist the stories of the events that prompted the *Buddha* to utter these verses as well as commentaries on the individual verses. The stories provide the context. The Commentary contains much useful material and, in some cases, provides the only means to understand the underlying meaning of the point that the *Buddha* was trying to get across.

I had several goals in mind when I undertook the task of preparing yet another translation of *The Dhammapada*. The first was to prepare a version that was doctrinally accurate, that is, fully in accord with the doctrinal positions of Theravādin Buddhism. The second was to reduce sexist language as much as possible. The third and final goal was to render the verses into English that was fresh, alive, and easy to understand, and that would appeal to a modern reader. Consulting the Commentary made the first goal easy to achieve. Much of the commentarial material is included in the footnotes that accompany each chapter. In a number of cases, I followed the common practice of incorporating the commentarial material into the translation itself, especially when a word-for-word translation would have been incomprehensible by itself. The second goal required careful wording. I used two devices to reduce sexist language: (1) I used plural pronouns and (2) I used indefinite pronouns. In those cases where it was obviously males who were being spoken to or spoken about, I made no changes. As for the final goal, I will let the readers judge for themselves whether I have succeeded.

As a final check on the accuracy of my translation, I compared it against several other popular translations. ■

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October 2007



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# 1 • Twin Verses

## (*Yamakavagga*)

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1. All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner;<sup>1</sup> they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made.<sup>2</sup> If one speaks or acts with evil intentions, suffering<sup>3</sup> will follow, just as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that pull it along.
2. All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner; they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with pure intentions, happiness will follow, like a shadow that never leaves one's side.
3. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me,<sup>4</sup> he robbed me" — those who dwell on such thoughts will never become free from hatred.
4. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me" — those who do not dwell on such thoughts will truly become free from hatred.
5. Returning hatred with hatred will never bring hatred to an end in this world; only by replacing hatred with love will hatred come to an end. This is an ancient and eternal law.<sup>5</sup>
6. People<sup>6</sup> do not understand that quarrelsome behavior leads only to self-destruction; for those who realize this,<sup>7</sup> quarrels quickly come to an end.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner in the sense that mind is the most dominant and is the cause of the other three mental phenomena: (1) feeling (*vedanā*); (2) perception (*saññā*); and (3) predisposing mental formations or mental concomitants (*saṃkhārā*). These three have mind or consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as their precursor because, although they arise simultaneously with mind, they cannot arise if mind does not arise.

<sup>2</sup> "Mind as their chief," "mind-made" here means intention or volition (*cetanā*). In those who are deluded worldlings, volition leads to the performance of volitional actions, both good and evil. This volition and the resultant actions constitute *kamma*, and *kamma* always follows one to produce results (*vipāka*). A more colloquial translation of the opening lines of the first two verses might be: "Mind is the starting point in shaping who we are — as we think, so we become."

<sup>3</sup> Physical or mental pain, misfortune, unsatisfactoriness, evil consequences, etc., and rebirth in lower planes of existence or in the lower strata of society if reborn in the human world.

<sup>4</sup> "[H]e defeated me" means that he got the better of me by bearing false witness, by argumentation and cross talk, or by retaliatory acts.

<sup>5</sup> An ancient principle followed by the *Buddhas* and their disciples. The meaning is not to return hatred by more hatred but to conquer it through loving-kindness (absence of hatred).

<sup>6</sup> Here, "people" refers to those who are not wise. Because they forget that death awaits them, they behave as though they were never going to die and keep on quarrelling. Therefore, they are sometimes referred to as "the ignorant" or "the foolish."

<sup>7</sup> The wise understand (or realize) that all are mortal, that all must die.

7. Just as a strong wind uproots a weak tree, so, whoever lives strictly for pleasure, who exercises no restraint over the senses, who eats to excess, who is lazy, who is inactive, such a one is easily overpowered by *Māra* — the Tempter, the Evil One.<sup>9</sup>
8. Just as the wind cannot blow away a rocky mountain, so, whoever does not live strictly for pleasure, who exercises restraint over the senses, who does not eat to excess, who is full of faith,<sup>10</sup> who disciplines the will, such a one is not overpowered by *Māra*.
9. Though one may put on the saffron-colored robe,<sup>11</sup> if one has not removed impurities from the mind, if one is lacking in self-discipline and truthfulness, then such a one is not worthy of wearing the saffron-colored robe.
10. Whoever has purified the mind, who is firmly established in moral behavior,<sup>12</sup> who possesses self-discipline and truthfulness, that one is indeed worthy of wearing the saffron-colored robe.
11. Those who imagine trivial things to be important or important things to be trivial are blinded by such wrong views and will never realize what is truly essential to living the Holy Life.
12. Those who have correctly understood what is trivial and what is important are not blinded by wrong views and have realized what is truly essential to living the Holy Life.
13. Just as rain seeps through an ill-thatched roof, so does lust<sup>13</sup> seep through an ill-trained mind.<sup>14</sup>
14. Just as rain cannot seep through a well-thatched roof, so can lust not seep through a well-trained mind.
15. Perceiving the results of past wrong actions, those who have done evil suffer — those who have done evil are afflicted; indeed, they suffer here and now, even after death they suffer — they suffer in both places.

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<sup>8</sup> This verse was uttered by the *Buddha* in connection with a quarrel that arose between two parties of *Bhikkhus*.

<sup>9</sup> The term *Māra* is used here in the sense of defilements hindering the realization of *nibbāna*. A more colloquial translation might be: "...such a one is easily overpowered by the slightest temptation."

<sup>10</sup> Unshakable faith in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha* as well as faith or belief in *kamma* and its results.

<sup>11</sup> The yellow or reddish robe worn by members of the Buddhist monastic Order.

<sup>12</sup> Who has discarded all moral defilements by means of the four Path Knowledges.

<sup>13</sup> Not only lust, but all defilements, such as ill will, lack of mindfulness, conceit, etc.

<sup>14</sup> A mind not cultivated in calm abiding and insight meditation.

16. Perceiving the results of past wholesome actions, those who have done good deeds rejoice, they rejoice exceedingly; indeed, they rejoice here and now, even after death they rejoice — they rejoice in both places.
17. Those who have done evil suffer here and now, even after death they suffer — the evildoers suffer in both places. Realizing the results of the wrong they have done, the evildoers suffer; and still more suffering awaits them in the next life.
18. Those who have done good<sup>15</sup> are happy here and now, even after death they are happy — those who have done good are happy in both places. Realizing the results of the good they have done, they are happy; and still more happiness awaits them in the next life.
19. Though one may be well-versed in the scriptures<sup>16</sup> and be able to recite them from beginning to end, if one does not put into practice their teachings, then such a heedless one may be likened to a cowherd who counts someone else's cattle — that one will gain none of the benefits of living the Holy Life.
20. Though one may know little of the scriptures, if one nonetheless puts into practice their teachings, forsaking lust, hatred, and false views, truly knowing, with a disciplined mind, clinging to nothing either in this life or the next, then that one will surely gain the benefits of living the Holy Life. ■

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<sup>15</sup> Meritorious deeds.

<sup>16</sup> This signifies the words of the *Buddha* preserved in the three *piṭakas*.



## 2 • Vigilance (*Appamādavagga*)

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21. Vigilance<sup>17</sup> is the way to the deathless.<sup>18</sup> Those who lack vigilance cannot escape death.<sup>19</sup> Those who are vigilant will go beyond death; those who are not vigilant are as if already dead.<sup>20</sup>
22. The wise fully understand this. They rejoice in being vigilant and find delight in the wisdom of the Noble Ones.<sup>21</sup>
23. Meditating<sup>22</sup> earnestly and striving for *nibbāna*, the wise attain the highest joy and freedom.<sup>23</sup>
24. If one is energetic, mindful, and pure in thought, word, and deed, and, if one does everything with care and consideration, restraining the senses, and earning a living in accordance with the *Dhamma*, then the fame and fortune of such a one will steadily increase.
25. Through diligence, mindfulness, discipline (with regard to the moral precepts), and control of the senses, let those who are wise make an island<sup>24</sup> of themselves which no flood<sup>25</sup> can overwhelm.
26. The immature<sup>26</sup> lose their vigilance, but the wise guard it as their greatest treasure.

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<sup>17</sup> *Appamāda*, “zeal, earnestness, diligence, thoughtfulness, watchfulness, vigilance, conscientiousness, heedfulness, non-laxity,” is considered to be the foundation of all progress.

<sup>18</sup> “Deathless” does not mean eternal life or immortality here. Rather, it means *nibbāna*.

<sup>19</sup> One who is not diligent cannot be liberated from rebirth; when reborn, one must grow old and die. Hence, lack of diligence is the cause of death.

<sup>20</sup> Those who are not diligent are like the dead, because they never think of giving in charity, or keeping the moral precepts, etc., and, in the case of *Bhikkhus*, because they do not fulfill their duties to their teachers and preceptors, nor do they cultivate calm abiding and insight meditation.

<sup>21</sup> Here, *Ariyas* “Noble Ones” means the pure ones like *Buddhas* and *Arahats*.

<sup>22</sup> In this verse, meditation means both calm abiding (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*).

<sup>23</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>24</sup> “Island,” in this context, stands for Arahatsip. Arahatsip is likened to an island because it enables one to escape from the stormy waters of the round of rebirths (*samsāra*).

<sup>25</sup> “Flood” is used as a metaphor for the evils and passions that can overwhelm humanity.

<sup>26</sup> Those who are spiritually immature, that is, both ignorant and ill-disciplined. The foolish and ignorant ones mentioned in this story were hooligans who were engaged in wild revelry and disorder during a particular festival. They were not mindful of others or of the consequences of their actions either in this world or the next.

27. Therefore, do not be negligent, do not become addicted to sensory pleasures. Those who meditate earnestly attain the highest happiness.
28. Overcoming negligence through mindfulness, the wise climb beyond suffering to the peaks of wisdom. They look upon the suffering multitude<sup>27</sup> as one standing on a mountaintop looks upon the plains below.
29. Diligent among those who are negligent, awake among those who slumber, the wise advance like a racehorse, leaving others behind.
30. It was through earnest effort<sup>28</sup> that *Magha* became *Sakka*, lord of the gods.<sup>29</sup> The diligent are always respected, the negligent never.
31. A *Bhikkhu* who takes delight in vigilance<sup>30</sup> and who sees danger in negligence<sup>31</sup> advances like a fire, burning all fetters, great and small.
32. A *Bhikkhu* who takes delight in vigilance and who sees danger in negligence cannot fall away.<sup>32</sup> He is, indeed, nearing *nibbāna*. ■

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<sup>27</sup> Worldlings.

<sup>28</sup> Diligence in performing meritorious deeds. In this story, Magha, a young man from Macala village, by diligently performing the meritorious deeds of cleaning and clearing land and making roads, was reborn as *Sakka*, lord of the gods.

<sup>29</sup> Gods, or *devas*, are celestial beings. They are inhabitants of higher realms of existence and, as a rule, are invisible to human beings. They are neither omnipotent nor omniscient. They are subject to ever-repeated rebirth, old age, and death and, thus, are not freed from cyclic existence and suffering. There are many classes of celestial beings. They are not to be confused with the gods or deities of Western religions.

<sup>30</sup> That is, who takes delight in the practice of calm abiding and insight meditation.

<sup>31</sup> The danger in negligence is that it leads to continued existence in the round of rebirths.

<sup>32</sup> Cannot fall away from the practice of calm abiding and insight meditation and the benefits thereof (Path and Fruit attainments).

## 3 • The Mind

### (*Cittavagga*)

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33. The mind is excitable and unsteady; it is difficult to control<sup>33</sup> and difficult to restrain.<sup>34</sup> As an archer aims an arrow, the wise straighten their restless thoughts.<sup>35</sup>
34. As a fish thrashes about in agony when it is taken out of the water and thrown onto dry ground, the mind taken out of the world of sense pleasures<sup>36</sup> to escape the grip of *Māra*<sup>37</sup> trembles<sup>38</sup> all over.
35. The mind is difficult to train — it goes where it likes and does what it wants.<sup>39</sup> It is good to tame the mind, for a well-trained mind brings happiness.
36. The mind is very difficult to perceive — it is both delicate and extremely subtle. It goes where it wants and settles where it wants. The wise should guard their minds, for a guarded mind brings happiness.<sup>40</sup>
37. The mind wanders far and moves about alone; it is formless; it lies in the cave.<sup>41</sup> Those who control their mind will be free from the bonds of *Māra*.
38. For those whose minds are unsteady, who are ignorant of the *Dhamma*, and whose faith is wavering, their wisdom will never grow.

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<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to keep the mind fixed on a single object when meditating.

<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to restrain the mind from drifting towards sense pleasures.

<sup>35</sup> The wise train their excitable, unsteady mind by means of calm abiding (*samatha*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā*).

<sup>36</sup> When it is being trained in meditation.

<sup>37</sup> Mental defilements.

<sup>38</sup> The mind trembles, attached to its “home” of the fivefold strand of sensuality, being taken out of it and subjected to the ardor of mental and physical enterprise of insight and meditational exertion for the purpose of discarding the whirl, which is the sway of *Māra* — that is, it is not able to hold itself steady in that condition. Even though this is so, the wise make the mind straight, competent in the task, in the manner stated.

<sup>39</sup> Moving about wherever it pleases, landing on any sense object without control.

<sup>40</sup> It brings about the ease of the Paths, of the Fruits, and of *nibbāna*.

<sup>41</sup> *Guhāsayaṃ*, that is, the seat of consciousness. The *Buddha* did not assign a specific physical location for the seat of consciousness as he did with the other senses. It was the cardiac theory (the theory that the heart is the seat of consciousness) that prevailed at the time, and this was evidently supported by the Upanishads. Though the *Buddha* could have adopted this popular theory, he did not commit himself. In the *Paṭṭhāna*, the *Book of Relations*, the *Buddha* refers to the seat of consciousness in indirect terms as “depending on that material thing.” What that “material thing” was, the *Buddha* did not positively assert.

39. They are wise whose thoughts are steady and minds serene, whose minds are not affected by lust and hatred, and who have abandoned both good and evil. They are awake and free from fear.
40. Remember that this body is like a fragile clay pot. Make your mind a fortress and conquer *Māra* with the weapon of wisdom. Even after defeating *Māra*, one should still continue to guard one's mind and feel no attachment to what has been gained.<sup>42</sup>
41. Remember that this body will soon lie in the earth without life, without value, useless as a rotten log.
42. More than those who hate you, more than all your enemies, an undisciplined mind does greater harm.<sup>43</sup>
43. More than your mother, more than your father, more than all your family, a well-disciplined mind does greater good. ■

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<sup>42</sup> In this context, not to be attached to *jhāna* ecstasy and serenity gained through meditative absorption, but to proceed further with insight meditation practices until the attainment of Arahantship.

<sup>43</sup> According to the Commentary, the mind, wrongly established in the ten kinds of evil, will cause ruin and destruction not only in this life but also even in a hundred thousand future existences. The ten kinds of evil are: (1) killing; (2) stealing; (3) sexual misconduct; (4) false speech; (5) slander; (6) harsh speech; (7) idle gossip; (8) covetousness; (9) ill will; and (10) false views.



## 4 • Flowers

### (*Pupphavagga*)

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44. Who will conquer this earth,<sup>44</sup> this realm of *Yama*,<sup>45</sup> and this world,<sup>46</sup> along with the world of the gods? As a garland-maker chooses the right flowers, choose the well-taught Path of the *Dhamma*,<sup>47</sup> and go beyond the realms of death and of the gods.
45. A disciple in training<sup>48</sup> will conquer this earth, this realm of *Yama*, and this world, along with the world of the gods. As a garland-maker chooses the right flowers, such a disciple will choose the well-taught Path of the *Dhamma* and go beyond the realms of death and of the gods.
46. One who remembers that this body is as impermanent as froth,<sup>49</sup> as insubstantial as a mirage,<sup>50</sup> will break the flower-tipped arrows of *Māra*<sup>51</sup> and pass beyond the sight of the King of Death.
47. Like those who spend their lives gathering flowers, those whose minds are attached to sense pleasures are swept away by death, just as a flood sweeps away a sleeping village.
48. Like those who spend their lives gathering flowers, those whose minds are attached to sense pleasures, whose desires are insatiable, are swept away by death.

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<sup>44</sup> This body.

<sup>45</sup> The four states of woe (*duggati*): (1) hell; (2) the animal kingdom; (3) the *Peta* or hungry ghost realms; and (4) the *Asura* or demon realms. Hell is not permanent according to Buddhism. It is a state of misery, as are the *Peta* realm and the *Asura* realm, where beings suffer for their past evil actions.

<sup>46</sup> Namely, the world of human beings and the six celestial planes. These seven are regarded as states of bliss (*sugati*).

<sup>47</sup> *Dhammapada*: the well-taught Path of Virtue; here, it means the thirty-seven Requisites of Enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya*).

<sup>48</sup> *Sekha* or *sekhapuggala* “one who is still undergoing training.” This term is applied to disciples who have attained any of the first three stages of holiness: (1) Stream-Winner (*Sotāpanna*); (2) Once-Returner (*Sakadāgāmi*); and (3) Non-Returner (*Anāgāmi*). Those who have totally eradicated all of the passions and attained the fruit stage of an *Arahat* are known as *asekhas* “those who have completed their training.”

<sup>49</sup> This body, that is, the aggregate of form or corporeality, is like froth or foam in that it is powerless and weak and does not last a long time — in other words, it is transient, fleeting, soon to perish.

<sup>50</sup> From a distance, a mirage appears to be real, but, up close, one realizes that it is empty, hollow, and intangible. In like manner, the body is like a mirage in the sense of passing away and reappearing at every instant.

<sup>51</sup> These “flower-tipped arrows of *Māra*” represent the *tivaṭṭam* or the three kinds of rounds (*vaṭṭam*): (1) the round of moral defilements (*kilesavaṭṭam*); (2) the round of volitional action (*kammavaṭṭam*); and (3) and the round of resultant effects (*vipākavaṭṭam*).

49. As a bee drinks nectar and then flies away without harming the flower, so should a *Bhikkhu* wander through a village.<sup>52</sup>
50. Do not give your attention to what others do or fail to do, whether they are doing what is right or what is wrong. Rather, give your attention to what you do or fail to do, whether you are doing what is right or what is wrong.
51. Just as a lovely flower, full of color but lacking in fragrance, cannot give anyone the benefit of its scent, the well-spoken words of the *Buddha* are of no benefit to those who do not put the *Dhamma* into practice.
52. Just as a lovely flower, full of both color and fragrance, will give the benefit of its scent to all, the well-spoken words of the *Buddha* will benefit those who put the *Dhamma* into practice.
53. Just as many garlands can be made from a heap of flowers, many good deeds can be done in this life (through the sharing of one's wealth with others<sup>53</sup>).
54. The scent of flowers cannot travel against the wind, nor can the scent of sandalwood or rhododendron or jasmine; but the fragrance<sup>54</sup> of those who do good spreads everywhere.
55. Neither the scent of sandalwood nor rhododendron, neither the scent of lotus nor jasmine, can come near the fragrance of those who do good.
56. Faint is the scent of sandalwood and rhododendron, but the fragrance of those who do good rises high, even to the abode of the gods.
57. *Māra*<sup>55</sup> cannot find the path<sup>56</sup> taken by those who are endowed with virtue, who live mindfully, and who have been freed from moral defilements by Right Knowledge.<sup>57</sup>
- 58–59. A true follower of the *Buddha* shines among blind mortals,<sup>58</sup> as the fragrant lotus, growing in the garbage by the roadside, brings joy to all who pass by. ■

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<sup>52</sup> Seeking alms, without inconveniencing anyone.

<sup>53</sup> Out of faith and generosity.

<sup>54</sup> That is, the reputation of those who do good.

<sup>55</sup> The personification of evil.

<sup>56</sup> *Arahats*, having eradicated moral defilements, are no longer subject to rebirth. So *Māra*, for all his power, cannot find where such *Arahats* go after death.

<sup>57</sup> Those who, having understood the nature of phenomena by perceiving cause, by inference, by reason, have attained liberation through the fivefold release: (1) release through elimination (*vikkhambhana-vimutti*); (2) release through cultivating the opposite (*tadaṅga-vimutti*); (3) release through cutting off (*samuccheda-vimutti*); (4) release through subsidence (*paṭippassaddhi-vimutti*); and (5) release through moving away (*nissaraṇa-vimutti*).

<sup>58</sup> Mortals (worldlings) are like the blind because they are lacking in wisdom.

## 5 • The Immature (*Bālavagga*)

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60. Long is the night to those who cannot sleep; long is the road to the weary. Long is the cycle of birth and death<sup>59</sup> to those who do not know the *Dhamma*.
61. If, as you travel through life, you do not find another whose understanding of the *Dhamma* is either equal to or greater than your own,<sup>60</sup> walk on alone.<sup>61</sup> One cannot advance by associating with those lacking wisdom.<sup>62</sup>
62. The immature<sup>63</sup> think, “These children are mine; this wealth is mine.” They cannot even call themselves their own, much less their children or wealth.
63. The immature who know they are immature have a little wisdom. But the immature who look on themselves as wise are utterly foolish.
64. Those who are immature cannot understand the *Dhamma* even if they spend their whole life with the wise. How can the spoon know the taste of soup?
65. If the mature<sup>64</sup> spend even a short time with the wise, they will understand the *Dhamma*, just as the tongue knows the taste of soup.

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<sup>59</sup> *Samsāra*, literally, “wandering again and again.” It is the ocean of life or existence. *Samsāra* is defined as the unbroken flow of the stream of aggregates, elements, and sense-faculties.

<sup>60</sup> Someone equal to or better than one in the qualities of virtue, integrity, and wisdom.

<sup>61</sup> Coming across one’s better, one will grow in virtue, integrity, and wisdom; coming across one’s equal, one will not degenerate; but living and sharing one’s daily life with an inferior causes one to degenerate in virtue and the like.

<sup>62</sup> Out of compassion (*karuṇā*), to work for their betterment, one may associate with them. In other words, if it is possible to help such people grow in virtue, integrity, and wisdom without expecting anything from them in return, then one may associate with them. But, if it is not possible to help them, one should be firmly set on being by oneself and living by oneself in every mode of deportment.

<sup>63</sup> *Bāla* — this is often translated as “fools” or “the foolish,” sometimes even as “childish persons.” It is the opposite of *pañña* “(the) wise” and refers to those who are ignorant, stupid, and mentally dull. Here, it is translated as “the immature.” Fools are not likely to change their behavior, while someone who is simply immature, given time and experience, can always learn and grow. They are spiritually immature inasmuch as they do not know what is good for this world and the world beyond, they are not able to put an end to the whirl of *samsāra*, and they do not know the noble *Dhamma* of the *Buddha*. Due to ignorance (*avijjā*), they act foolishly, creating fresh *kamma*, leading to repeated rebirth in cyclic existence.

<sup>64</sup> If one associates with a wise person even for a short time, then such a one, learning from the wise person and inquiring, will come, little by little, to understand the *Dhamma*. Thereafter, through deepening one’s knowledge and putting what one has learned into practice, striving on with diligence, one will advance like a racehorse and will, inevitably, transcend the world.

66. The immature<sup>65</sup> are their own enemies, doing selfish deeds which will bring them sorrow.
67. That deed is poorly done<sup>66</sup> if one feels remorse for having done it and if it brings suffering in its wake.
68. But good is that deed which brings no remorse, only happiness, in its wake.
69. As long as the evil deed does not bear fruit, the immature think it is sweet like honey.<sup>67</sup> But when the evil deed ripens, they suffer.
70. Even if the immature fast month after month, taking food sparingly with only the tip of a blade of grass, they are not worth a sixteenth part of those who truly understand the *Dhamma*.<sup>68</sup>
71. As fresh milk<sup>69</sup> needs time to curdle, an evil deed needs time to bear its fruit. It follows the immature, eventually burning them, like fire smoldering under the ashes.
72. Even if they pick up a little knowledge, the immature misuse it and break their heads<sup>70</sup> instead of benefiting from it.
73. The immature *Bhikkhus* desire praise for qualities they do not have, preeminence among fellow monks,<sup>71</sup> authority in the monasteries,<sup>72</sup> and veneration from those not related to them.<sup>73</sup>
74. “Listen, monks and householders, I can do this; I can do that. I am right, and you are wrong. Obey me.” Fools, thinking thus, only increase their desires and pride.

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<sup>65</sup> Those of little intelligence, those who are ignorant.

<sup>66</sup> Having done a deed that can produce rebirth in states of woe, and so on, whose outcome is painful, remembering which one feels regret and grieves at the very instant of remembrance — that is, a deed which is not good, not admirable, not gainful.

<sup>67</sup> To those who are doing a bad (*pāpa*), unwholesome (*akusala*) deed, the deed appears desirable, pleasant, and attractive, like honey, like a sweet drink. Hence, they regard it as if it were sweet like honey.

<sup>68</sup> The Noble Ones — those who have attained one of the four stages of holiness.

<sup>69</sup> Warm milk that has just been drawn from a cow’s udder.

<sup>70</sup> Here, “head” means “wisdom.” The meaning is that their wisdom and merit are brought down, ruined, destroyed.

<sup>71</sup> Such *Bhikkhus* desire to have a following of other *Bhikkhus*, thinking: “Would that the *Bhikkhus* in the entire monastery surround me and go about with me asking me questions.”

<sup>72</sup> From among the dwellings that belong as common property to the Order, assigning the more comfortable lodging places at the center of the monastery to *Bhikkhus* who are their friends and companions, and reserving the best for themselves, while assigning the least desirable lodgings, those that are farthest away, that are soiled, that are imperiled by vermin, to visiting *Bhikkhus* or to *Bhikkhus* who are not their friends and companions.

<sup>73</sup> They wish for reverential gifts of the four kinds of requisites not only from their parents and relatives but also from those not related to them, thinking: “Would that they give only to me and to no one else!”

75. One path leads to worldly gain and pleasure, another to *nibbāna*. Fully realizing this, do not, O disciples of the *Buddha*, take delight in worldly gain and honor, but devote yourselves instead to solitude, detachment, and the realization of *nibbāna*. ■



## 6 • The Wise (*Paṇḍitavagga*)

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76. If you find someone wise,<sup>74</sup> who can steer you away from the wrong path,<sup>75</sup> follow that person as you would one who can reveal hidden treasures. Only good<sup>76</sup> can come from following such a person.
77. Those who are wise should admonish others; they should give advice<sup>77</sup> to others; and they should prevent others from doing what is wrong.<sup>78</sup> Ones such as these are held dear by the good; they are disliked only by the bad.
78. Make friends with those who are good and worthy, not with those who are bad and low.<sup>79</sup>
79. Those who imbibe<sup>80</sup> the *Dhamma* live in joy with a serene mind.<sup>81</sup> The wise take delight in the *Dhamma*<sup>82</sup> expounded by the Noble Ones.<sup>83</sup>
80. As irrigators channel water where they want, as archers make their arrows straight, as carpenters fashion timber,<sup>84</sup> the wise shape their minds.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> One who is endowed with insight, one who knows and practices the *Dhamma*.

<sup>75</sup> That is, a wise person who, out of compassion, respectfully points out your faults in order to make you understand what you have not properly understood, with a desire to increase your virtues, and so forth. Such a one is concerned only with your development, your welfare, your happiness.

<sup>76</sup> There will be growth, not decay (of wisdom).

<sup>77</sup> They should give advice in advance, and they should give advice repeatedly.

<sup>78</sup> One admonishes or counsels others concerning matters that have already taken place; one advises others concerning matters that have not yet taken place; and one prevents or restrains others from doing, thinking, or speaking that which is of an unwholesome nature and also establishes others in doing, thinking, and speaking that which is of a wholesome nature.

<sup>79</sup> Bad or evil friends are those who are attached to unwholesome deeds, such as physical misconduct. Low friends are those who try to persuade one to perform one or more of the twenty-one kinds of wrong-doing (*dukkata*). Those who have opposite qualities are good friends and worthy friends. One should only make friends with those who are good and worthy.

<sup>80</sup> Contacting with body the ninefold *Dhamma* that transcends the world, realizing as object, penetratively seeing the Four Noble Truths by means of comprehension, and so forth, through full knowledge — that is how one “imbibes” the *Dhamma*.

<sup>81</sup> Not befuddled, free of defilements.

<sup>82</sup> *Dhamma* which is conducive to Enlightenment in its many varieties, such as making awareness firm, and which has been expounded by Noble Ones, such as the *Buddhas*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ariya* “Noble One” indicates nobility of character. It is typically applied to *Buddhas* as well as to those who have attained one of the four stages of holiness. Here, it refers to *Buddhas* and *Arahats*.

<sup>84</sup> Carpenters fashion timber into things that people need or want by cutting, sawing, planing, carving, etc.

81. As a solid rock cannot be moved by the wind, the wise are not shaken<sup>86</sup> by praise or blame.<sup>87</sup>
82. When the wise listen to the words of the *Dhamma*, their minds become calm and clear, like the waters of a still lake.<sup>88</sup>
83. Those who are virtuous surrender all.<sup>89</sup> They do not engage in idle chatter, nor do they hanker for sense pleasures.<sup>90</sup> They are the same in good fortune and in bad.<sup>91</sup>
84. If one desires neither children nor wealth nor power nor success by unfair means, either for one's own sake or for the sake of others,<sup>92</sup> know such a one to be good, wise, and virtuous.
85. Few are those who reach the other shore;<sup>93</sup> most people keep running up and down this shore.<sup>94</sup>
86. But those who follow the *Dhamma*, when it has been well taught, will reach the other shore, hard to reach, beyond the power of death.
- 87–88. Those who are wise, leaving craving behind and having *nibbāna* as their goal, should abandon evil ways<sup>95</sup> and cultivate pure, good ones.<sup>96</sup> They should seek delight in solitude, detachment, and *nibbāna*, which an ordinary person finds so

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<sup>85</sup> In the same way, the wise develop the Paths such as Stream Entry and thus tame their minds. When Arahantship is attained, their minds have become perfectly tamed.

<sup>86</sup> Not perturbed or bothered.

<sup>87</sup> When they are confronted by the eight worldly conditions, the wise are neither attracted nor repulsed, neither happy nor sad, neither elated nor depressed. To them, things and events simply are what they are, no more, no less. The eight worldly conditions are: (1) gain (*lābha*) and (2) loss (*alābha*); (3) fame (*yaśa*) and (4) infamy or ill-repute (*ayaśa*); (5) praise (*paraṃsā*) and (6) blame (*nindā*); and (7) happiness (*sukha*) and (8) pain (*dukkha*).

<sup>88</sup> Just as a lake is clear because it is free from impurities and undisturbed when it is motionless, the wise, having heard the *Dhamma* and having attained an undefiled mind by way of the Path of Stream-Entry and the rest, become calm. After having attained Arahantship, they are perfectly calm.

<sup>89</sup> Attachment to the five aggregates of existence, etc.

<sup>90</sup> They do not chatter for their own part, nor do they get others to chatter, for the sake of sense pleasures, for reasons of politeness, to make small talk, etc. The virtuous do neither of these things.

<sup>91</sup> The wise do not manifest either high or low (elation or depression), either in the form of being pleased or displeased or in the form of expressing the satisfactory or unsatisfactory nature of events.

<sup>92</sup> Those who are wise will not commit a detrimental act, either for their own sake or for the sake of others.

<sup>93</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>94</sup> That is, they cling to the five aggregates of existence.

<sup>95</sup> Physical misconduct, and so forth.

<sup>96</sup> Wise *Bhikkhus* should develop the bright *Dhamma*, in all its varieties, such as physical good conduct, and so forth, from the time of going forth into the Holy Life (*brahmacariya*) up until reaching the Path of Arahantship.



difficult to enjoy. They should also abandon sense pleasures and, clinging to nothing, should cleanse themselves of all impurities<sup>97</sup> of the mind.

89. Those whose minds are well trained in the Seven Factors of Enlightenment<sup>98</sup> and who have rid themselves of all clinging,<sup>99</sup> rejoice in having abandoned craving.<sup>100</sup> Such ones, who have eradicated all moral intoxicants,<sup>101</sup> have attained *nibbāna* even in this world.<sup>102</sup> ■

<sup>97</sup> The five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*): (1) desire for gratification of the senses (*kāmacchanda*); (2) ill will, hatred, anger, aversion (*vyāpāda*); (3) sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*); (4) restlessness, worry, agitation (*uddhacca-kukkucca*); and (5) skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*).

<sup>98</sup> The Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) are: (1) mindfulness (*sati*); (2) investigation of the Truth (*Dhamma-vicaya*, that is, “seeking knowledge,” specifically, knowledge of the Four Noble Truths); (3) energy (*virīya*); (4) rapture, zest, ecstasy (*pīti*); (5) tranquility (*passadhi*); (6) concentration (*samādhi*); and (7) equanimity (*upekkhā*). The Seven Factors of Enlightenment are the requisites for attaining Path Insight.

<sup>99</sup> Clinging (*upādāna*) is an intensified degree of craving (*taṇhā*). There are four kinds of clinging: (1) sense-desires (*kāmuṇāpādāna*); (2) false beliefs (*diṭṭhupādāna*); (3) adherence to wrongful rites and rituals (*sīlabbatupādāna*); and (4) personality belief (*atta-vādupādāna*).

<sup>100</sup> Craving (*taṇhā*) is the chief cause of suffering (*dukkha*) and of the ever-continuing cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*).

<sup>101</sup> *Āsavas* (literally “influxes”) “cankers, taints, corruptions, intoxicants, biases.” There are four kinds of cankers: (1) desire for gratification of the senses (*kāmasava*); (2) desire for eternal existence (*bhavāsava*); (3) wrong views (*diṭṭhāsava*); and (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*). The first *āsava* is attachment to the sentient realm; the second is attachment to the Realm of Form and the Formless Realms.

<sup>102</sup> On attaining Arahantship, the final stage of holiness, one eradicates all impurities and realizes *nibbāna* in this very life. This is known as *sopādisesa nibbāna*, that is, experiencing the bliss of *nibbāna* with the body (that is, the five aggregates [*khandhas*]) remaining. The *Arahat* lives as long as the power of his rebirth reproductive *kamma* lasts, just as a spinning wheel keeps rotating even after the hand has been removed. After death, he attains *anupādisesa nibbāna*, that is, *nibbāna* without the body (that is, without the aggregates).



## 7 • The *Arahat*<sup>103</sup> (*Arahantavagga*)

90. They have completed their journey;<sup>104</sup> they are freed from sorrow<sup>105</sup> and from all else.<sup>106</sup> The bonds<sup>107</sup> of life have fallen from them, and the fever (of passions) no longer exists in them.<sup>108</sup>
91. The thoughtful strive diligently.<sup>109</sup> They take no delight in home-life,<sup>110</sup> but forsake home after home,<sup>111</sup> as swans leave the lake.
92. *Arahats* accumulate nothing.<sup>112</sup> When taking food, they reflect over it with full understanding of its nature.<sup>113</sup> Their sole goal is liberation,<sup>114</sup> which is void and signless.<sup>115</sup> Like the flight of birds in the sky, their path cannot be traced.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> An *Arahat*, literally, “worthy one,” is one who has destroyed all passions such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and ignorance (*avijjā*). After the death of their physical bodies, *Arahats* are not reborn but attain *parinibbāna*.

<sup>104</sup> Here, “journey” means the round of rebirths (*samsāra*).

<sup>105</sup> One becomes freed from sorrow on attaining the third stage of holiness, Non-Returner (*Anāgāmi*), one who is not born again in this world.

<sup>106</sup> They are freed in regard to all phenomena (*dhamma*), such as the five aggregates (*khandha*) and the like.

<sup>107</sup> There are four kinds of bonds or ties (*ganthas*): (1) covetousness (*abhiijhā*); (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*); (3) indulgence in wrongful rites and ceremonies (*sīlabbataparamāsa*); and (4) adherence to one’s dogma or dogmatic fanaticism (*idam saccabhinivesa*). “These things are called ‘bonds,’ since they bind this mental and material body” (*Visuddhimagga* XXII, 54).

<sup>108</sup> This verse refers to the ethical state of an *Arahat*. Heat is both physical and mental. *Arahats* experience bodily heat as long as they are alive, but they are not worried by it. They do not, however, experience the mental heat (fever) of passions.

<sup>109</sup> In calm abiding (*samatha*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā*).

<sup>110</sup> That is, the life of sense pleasures.

<sup>111</sup> *Arahats* wander wherever they like without attachment to any particular place, inasmuch as they are free from the concept of “I” and “mine.” The meaning here is that they have relinquished all attachments.

<sup>112</sup> There are two kinds of accumulation: (1) accumulation of *kamma* and (2) accumulation of possessions. One’s wholesome and unwholesome deeds amount to accumulation of *kamma*. A *Bhikkhu*’s four requisites constitute accumulation of possessions. In this regard, a *Bhikkhu* dwelling in a monastery, keeping one lump of sugar, four portions only of clarified butter (ghee), and one measure (*nāli*) of uncooked rice is not accumulation of possessions, but keeping more than that is.

<sup>113</sup> In accordance with the three *pariññās*. *Pariññā* means “full comprehension, full understanding”. The three *pariññās* are: (1) full understanding of the known; (2) full understanding of investigating; and (3) full understanding as overcoming.

<sup>114</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>115</sup> It is called “void” because it is free from greed, hatred, and ignorance. It is called “signless” because it is free from the signs of greed, hatred, and ignorance. *Arahats* experience the bliss of *nibbāna* while alive.

<sup>116</sup> Just as the track of birds that fly through the sky is hard to trace, is impossible to know, because they leave no visible sign or mark (such as a footprint) that one can see, similarly, those in whom the twofold

93. *Arahats* are free from cankers;<sup>117</sup> they are not attached to food. Their sole goal is liberation, which is void and signless. Like the flight of birds in the sky, their path cannot be traced.
94. Even the gods cherish such steadfast ones,<sup>118</sup> whose sense faculties are calm, like horses well-trained by charioteers, and who are free from pride and cankers.
95. Like the earth, *Arahats* are patient and cannot be provoked to respond in anger. They stand firm and steady, like a column.<sup>119</sup> They are serene<sup>120</sup> and pure, like a lake without mud.<sup>121</sup> They are free from the cycle of birth and death.
96. Wisdom has stilled their minds, and their thoughts, words, and deeds are filled with peace. Truly knowing the *Dhamma*, they are free from moral defilements and are unperturbed by the ups and downs of life.
97. Those who are not credulous,<sup>122</sup> who have realized the unconditioned,<sup>123</sup> who have cut off the links of the round of rebirths, who have destroyed all consequences of good and bad deeds, who have discarded all craving, are indeed the noblest of all.<sup>124</sup>
98. They make holy wherever they dwell, in a village or a forest, in a valley or on a hill.
99. With their senses at peace and their minds full of joy, they take delight in secluded forests,<sup>125</sup> where worldlings are loath to go. ■

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accumulation is not found, who understand food by the three forms of understanding, whose goal is liberation, in their case too, the path by which they have departed is hard to trace; it cannot be followed, due to lack of indications.

<sup>117</sup> *Āsavas* (literally, “influxes”) “cankers, taints, corruptions, intoxicants, biases.”

<sup>118</sup> Even the gods — and also human beings — eagerly long for the sight and arrival of ones such as these, who are steadfast in self-control and freedom.

<sup>119</sup> *Indakhīla* “Indra’s column.” The commentators mention that *indakhīlas* were firm posts, stakes, or columns which were erected either inside or outside a city as an embellishment. Usually, they were made of bricks or durable wood in octangular shapes. Half of the column was embedded in the ground, hence the metaphor “as firm and steady as an *indakhīla*.” Another possible translation is “threshold.”

<sup>120</sup> That is, they have neither attachment to desirable objects nor aversion to undesirable objects. Nor do they cling to anything. Amidst the eight worldly conditions, they remain unperturbed, manifesting neither attachment nor aversion, neither elation nor depression. The eight worldly conditions are: (1) gain (*lābha*) and (2) loss (*alābha*); (3) fame (*yaśa*) and (4) infamy or ill-repute (*ayaśa*); (5) praise (*paramāsa*) and (6) blame (*nindā*); and (7) happiness (*sukha*) and (8) pain (*dukkha*).

<sup>121</sup> The lake water, being free from mud, is unpolluted; *Arahats*, being free from defilements, are also unpolluted (“serene and pure”).

<sup>122</sup> Inasmuch as they have understood and experienced the Truth for themselves, they do not take things upon faith from the words of others. They do not believe things which they know are not true.

<sup>123</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>124</sup> *Arahats*.

<sup>125</sup> They do not seek sense pleasures. Hence, *Arahats* prefer secluded forests, far from the allure of sense objects.

## 8 • Thousands (*Sahassavagga*)

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100. Better than a speech of a thousand words that are senseless and unconnected with the realization of *nibbāna* is one thoughtful word that brings peace to the mind.
101. Better than a poem of a thousand verses that are senseless and unconnected with the realization of *nibbāna* is one thoughtful line of verse that brings peace to the mind.
102. Better than the recitation of a hundred verses that are senseless and unconnected with the realization of *nibbāna* is one word of the *Dhamma* that brings peace to the mind.
103. One who conquers oneself<sup>126</sup> is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield.
- 104—105. It is better to be victorious over yourself than to conquer others. When you attain victory over yourself, neither the gods nor *Māra* can turn it into defeat.
106. Better than performing a thousand rituals month after month for a hundred years is paying homage, even if only for a moment, to one living in wisdom.<sup>127</sup>
107. Better than tending the sacrificial fire in the forest for a hundred years is paying homage, even if only for a moment, to one living in wisdom.
108. Making gifts<sup>128</sup> and sacrificial offerings,<sup>129</sup> great and small, for a whole year to earn merit is not worth a quarter of the honor paid to the Noble Ones who walk the right path.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Those who contemplate on internal subjects of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*), by day as well as by night, and who conquer themselves through the conquest of their defilements such as greed, and so forth.

<sup>127</sup> A *Bhikkhu* who has practiced insight meditation and is, therefore, self-composed, self-disciplined.

<sup>128</sup> That which is prepared and given either to invited guests or with a belief in *kamma* and its results (such as, for instance, giving charitable donations with the thought of gaining merit by so doing).

<sup>129</sup> This generally means offerings given in connection with festive activities.

<sup>130</sup> *Ariyapuggalas*, that is, *Sotāpannas* (Stream-Winners), *Sakadāgāmis* (Once-Returners), *Anāgāmis* (Non-Returners), and *Arahats* (Worthy Ones). The idea conveyed by this verse is that reverence paid to Noble Ones is far superior to gifts and offerings given to worldlings. “Stream-Winners” (*Sotāpannas*) are also called “Stream-Enterers,” that is, “one who has entered the stream (of liberation),” and the first stage of holiness is known as “Stream-Entry” (*Sotāpatti*).

109. To those who respect and honor the wise<sup>131</sup> and follow them, four gifts will come in increasing measure: health,<sup>132</sup> happiness,<sup>133</sup> beauty, and long life.
110. Better than living for a hundred years with those who are immoral and who have no control over their senses is one day living with those who are virtuous and who cultivate calm abiding and insight meditation.
111. Better than living for a hundred years with those who are ignorant and who have no control over their senses is one day living with those who are wise and who cultivate calm abiding and insight meditation.
112. Better than living for a hundred years with those who are idle<sup>134</sup> and inactive is one day living with those who make zealous and strenuous effort (to cultivate calm abiding and insight meditation).
113. Better than living for a hundred years with those who do not perceive the arising and dissolution of the five aggregates<sup>135</sup> is one day living with those who perceive the arising and dissolution of the five aggregates.
114. Better than living for a hundred years with those who do not perceive the deathless state<sup>136</sup> is one day living with those who perceive the deathless state.
115. Better than living for a hundred years with those who do not comprehend the Noble *Dhamma*<sup>137</sup> is one day living with those who comprehend the Noble *Dhamma*. ■

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<sup>131</sup> Those who are advanced in age, wisdom, and virtue.

<sup>132</sup> Physical and mental vigor.

<sup>133</sup> Physical and mental happiness.

<sup>134</sup> According to the Commentary, those who are idle pass their time immersed in unwholesome thoughts.

<sup>135</sup> The rise and decay of mind and matter — that is, the impermanent nature of all conditioned things. The disciples of the *Buddha* are expected to contemplate the fleeting nature of life in order not to be attached to illusory material pleasures.

<sup>136</sup> The unconditioned state of *nibbāna*, free from birth, decay, and death.

<sup>137</sup> That is, the nine supramundane states, namely, the Four Paths, the Four Fruits of holiness, and *nibbāna*.

## 9 • Evil

### (*Pāpavagga*)

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116. Hasten to do good;<sup>138</sup> restrain your mind from evil; for the mind of one who is slow in doing good tends to take delight in doing evil.<sup>139</sup>
117. If you do what is evil, do not repeat it or take pleasure in making it a habit. An evil habit will cause nothing but suffering.
118. If you do what is good,<sup>140</sup> keep repeating it and take pleasure in making it a habit. A good habit will cause nothing but joy.
119. Even though those who are evil<sup>141</sup> may still find happiness as long as they do not reap what they have sown, when they do, sorrow overcomes them.
120. Even though those who are good<sup>142</sup> may still encounter suffering as long as they do not reap what they have sown, when they do, joy overcomes them.
121. No one should think lightly of evil, imagining: “Sorrow will not come to me.” Little by little, a person will be filled with evil, as a pot is filled by drops of water.

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<sup>138</sup> There should be no hesitation in doing good deeds. One must avail oneself of every opportunity to do good. Every effort should be made to control the mind, inasmuch as it is prone to evil. The unpurified mind rejoices in evil thoughts.

<sup>139</sup> *Pāpa* “evil” is that which defiles one’s mind. It is that which leads to woeful states. That which is associated with greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) is evil. There are ten kinds of evil deeds: (1) killing; (2) stealing; (3) sexual misconduct; (4) false speech; (5) slander; (6) harsh speech; (7) idle gossip; (8) covetousness; (9) ill will; and (10) false views.

<sup>140</sup> *Puñña* “merit” is that which cleanses one’s mind. *Kusala* “karmically wholesome or profitable; salutary; morally good; skillful” is another term for *puñña*. There are ten kinds of meritorious deeds: (1) generosity (*dāna*); (2) morality (*sīla*); (3) meditation (*bhāvanā*); (4) reverence (*apaciti*); (5) service (*veyyāvacca*); (6) transference of merit (*pattānuppadāna*); (7) rejoicing in other’s merit (*abbhanumodana*); (8) teaching the *Dhamma* (*desanā*); (9) hearing the *Dhamma* (*savana*); and (10) straightening one’s views (*diṭṭhujukamma*).

<sup>141</sup> The wicked may lead prosperous lives as a result of their past good deeds. They will experience happiness owing to the potentiality of their past good over the present evil, a seeming injustice that often prevails in this world. When, according to the inexorable law of *kamma*, their evil deeds begin to ripen, they will perceive the painful effects of their wickedness.

<sup>142</sup> The virtuous, as it often happens, may meet with adversity owing to the potentiality of their past evil actions over the present good deeds. They are convinced of the efficacy of their present good deeds only when, at the opportune moment, they begin to ripen, giving them abundant joy.

The fact that, at times, the wicked are prosperous and the virtuous are unfortunate is itself strong evidence to believe in *kamma* and rebirth.

122. No one should think lightly of good, imagining: “Joy will not come to me.” Little by little, a person will be filled with merit, as a pot is filled by drops of water.
123. As a rich merchant traveling alone avoids dangerous roads, as one who loves life avoids poison, let everyone avoid evil deeds.
124. If you have no wound on your hand, you can touch poison without being harmed. No harm comes to those who do no harm.
125. If you harm a person who should not be harmed,<sup>143</sup> one who is pure and free from moral defilements, you harm yourself, as dust thrown against the wind comes back to the thrower.
126. Some are born again as human beings.<sup>144</sup> Those caught in evil ways go to a state of intense suffering; those who have done good go to a state of joy; but those who are free from moral intoxicants<sup>145</sup> realize *nibbāna*.
127. Not in the sky, nor in the middle of the ocean, nor in mountain canyons, nor anywhere else in the world is there a place where one can escape from the consequences of one’s evil deeds.<sup>146</sup>
128. Not in the sky, nor in the ocean, nor in mountain canyons, nor anywhere else in the world is there a place where one can hide from death. ■

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<sup>143</sup> An *Arahat*.

<sup>144</sup> According to Buddhism, there are four kinds of birth: (1) egg-born (*aṇḍaja*); (2) womb-born (*jalābuja*); (3) moisture-born (*samsedaja*); and (4) spontaneous birth (*opapātika*).

<sup>145</sup> *Āsavās* (literally, “influxes”) “cankers, taints, corruptions, intoxicants, biases.”

<sup>146</sup> It is impossible to escape the law of moral causation, nor can one avoid the woeful consequences of one’s bad deeds by hiding in any place. No god or even a *Buddha* can intervene in the operation of *kamma*.



## 10 • Punishment (*Dañḍavagga*)

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129. Everyone fears punishment; everyone fears death, just as you do. Therefore, do not kill or cause to kill.
130. Everyone fears punishment; everyone loves life, just as you do. Therefore, do not kill or cause to kill.
131. If, hoping to be happy, you strike at others who are also seeking happiness, you will be happy neither here nor hereafter.
132. If, hoping to be happy, you do not strike at others who are also seeking happiness, you will be happy here and hereafter.
133. Speak quietly to everyone, and they too will be gentle in their speech. Harsh words<sup>147</sup> hurt and come back to the speaker.
134. If you can keep your mind calm and quiet, like a broken gong which is no longer resonant, you are sure to realize *nibbāna*, leaving all harsh speech behind you.
135. As, with a staff, a cowherd drives cattle to fresh pastures, so also, old age and death drive the life of all beings.
136. While they are performing evil deeds, the immature do not know what is in store for them.<sup>148</sup> They will suffer for their evil deeds, like one who is burned by fire.
- 137—140. If one harms those who are innocent<sup>149</sup> and who should not be harmed, suffering will come in one of these ten ways: they may suffer severe pain, or poverty, or injury to the body (such as, for example, loss of limbs), or serious illness (such as, for example, leprosy), or insanity, or misfortunes,<sup>150</sup> or wrongful or serious accusations,<sup>151</sup> or loss of relatives, or loss of wealth, or the burning down of

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<sup>147</sup> Malicious talk. According to the Commentary, it means belittling others.

<sup>148</sup> The meaning is that, while performing detrimental or evil deeds under the influence of hatred, ill will, or aversion, they are not aware that there will inevitably be consequences for their actions.

<sup>149</sup> Those who have caused no harm, either toward themselves or toward others. The reference here is to *Arahats*,

<sup>150</sup> Such as the loss of one's position or one's job or one's reputation.

<sup>151</sup> Slander.

their house by fire or lightning, and, after death, they will be reborn in a place of continuous suffering.<sup>152</sup>

141. Not by going about naked,<sup>153</sup> nor by having matted hair,<sup>154</sup> nor by smearing oneself with mud, nor by fasting, nor by sleeping on the ground, nor by covering oneself with dust, nor by sitting motionless — no amount of penance<sup>155</sup> can purify a person who has not overcome doubt.<sup>156</sup>
142. But those whose mind is serene, who are free from moral defilements, who have their senses controlled, who are established in Path Insight,<sup>157</sup> who are perfectly pure,<sup>158</sup> and who have laid aside violence towards all beings<sup>159</sup> — these are true *brāhmaṇas*, true ascetics, true monks,<sup>160</sup> even if they wear fine clothes.
143. It is rare to find in this world those who, out of a sense of shame, refrain from doing evil and who have trained their minds. As a well-trained horse needs no whip, a well-trained mind needs no prodding to be good.<sup>161</sup>
144. Like a well-trained horse, touched by the whip,<sup>162</sup> be diligent and zealous. Through confidence,<sup>163</sup> virtue, effort, concentration, and investigation of the Truth,<sup>164</sup> be endowed with knowledge and firm in the practice of morality; with mindfulness, leave this great misery<sup>165</sup> behind.
145. As irrigators channel water where they want, as archers make their arrows straight, as carpenters fashion timber, the wise shape their minds. ■

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<sup>152</sup> Even after having come by one of these ten conditions in the present life, suffering does not end but continues ever onward until all of one's evil actions have been expiated.

<sup>153</sup> Naked asceticism is still practiced in India. External dirtiness is regarded by some as a mark of holiness. The *Buddha* denounced such external forms of asceticism. The members of the celibate Order (the *Saṅgha*) follow a middle path, avoiding the extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence. Simplicity, humility, and poverty should be the marked characteristics of *Bhikkhus* as much as cleanliness.

<sup>154</sup> In India (*Jambudīpa*), unwashed, matted hair was (and still is) regarded as a sign of holiness.

<sup>155</sup> Austerities, self-mortification.

<sup>156</sup> With regard to the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*.

<sup>157</sup> The four paths are: (1) the path of Stream-Entry (*Sotāpatti*); (2) the path of Once-Return (*Sakadāgāmi*); (3) the path of Non-Return (*Anāgāmi*); and (4) the path of Arahantship (*Arahatta*).

<sup>158</sup> In their conduct.

<sup>159</sup> Absolutely harmless to all in thought, word, and deed.

<sup>160</sup> Because they have overcome all impurities, all passions.

<sup>161</sup> A self-respecting *Bhikkhu* or lay person, when obsessed with evil thoughts, tries to eradicate them then and there. This verse indicates that such persons are rare.

<sup>162</sup> A well-trained horse, having been touched by the whip due to being negligent, will make an earnest attempt thereafter not to be so neglectful.

<sup>163</sup> *Saddhā* "faith, confidence."

<sup>164</sup> The *Dhamma*.

<sup>165</sup> Cyclic existence (*samsāra*).

## 11 • Old Age (*Jarāvagga*)

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146. Why is there laughter, why merriment, when this world is on fire?<sup>166</sup> When you are living in darkness,<sup>167</sup> why do you not look for light?<sup>168</sup>
147. Behold this lovely body,<sup>169</sup> this mass of sores, supported by bones, subject to illness, highly thought of.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, this body is neither permanent nor enduring.
148. Quite worn out is this body,<sup>171</sup> a nest for disease, subject to decay. This putrid body will eventually disintegrate; life, indeed, ends with death.<sup>172</sup>
149. What pleasure can there be for those who see that their white bones will be cast away, like gourds in the autumn?
150. Around the bones is built a house, plastered with flesh and blood, in which dwell pride<sup>173</sup> and scorn,<sup>174</sup> old age and death.
151. Even the ornamented chariot of a king loses its glitter in the course of time; so, too, the body loses its health and strength. But the *Dhamma* of the righteous does not grow old with the passage of time. Thus do the righteous<sup>175</sup> reveal it to those ready to listen.

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<sup>166</sup> Burning with the fires of passion, etc.

<sup>167</sup> Here, “darkness” means ignorance of the Four Noble Truths.

<sup>168</sup> Visākhā, the chief lay benefactress of the *Buddha*, once visited Him accompanied by some women, who, without her knowledge, brought liquor with them and drank it all. Visākhā asked the *Buddha* to teach them the *Dhamma*. By that time, however, the women had become drunk. Shamelessly, they began boisterously singing, dancing, clapping, and jumping about in the monastery. By using His psychic powers, the *Buddha* created a darkness which brought them to their senses. He then uttered this verse.

This world is perpetually consumed with the flames of the passions. It is completely shrouded in the veil of ignorance. Being placed in such a world, the wise should try to seek the light of wisdom (*paññā*).

<sup>169</sup> Made lovely, beautiful, attractive on account of clothing, jewelry, perfume, etc.

<sup>170</sup> As good and pleasant.

<sup>171</sup> Worn out due to old age.

<sup>172</sup> It is important to remember that this body will soon disintegrate. Why so? Because the life of all beings has death as its end.

<sup>173</sup> Smugness, conceit, self-estimation, self-importance, arrogance, haughtiness, etc. This means regarding one’s own virtues, reputation, accomplishments, intelligence, importance, abilities, race, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, religion, nationality, and so forth as superior to others.

<sup>174</sup> Disdain, contempt, etc. This means regarding the virtues, reputation, and so forth of others as inferior to one’s own.

<sup>175</sup> Such as the *Buddhas*.

152. A man who does not learn from life grows old like an ox; his body grows, but not his wisdom.
153. I have gone through many rounds of birth and death, seeking, but not finding, the builder of this house.<sup>176</sup> Sorrowful, indeed, is birth and death again and again!
154. But now I have seen you, O house-builder; you shall not build this house (for me) again — its rafters are broken; its ridgepole is shattered. My mind has reached the unconditioned;<sup>177</sup> the end of craving<sup>178</sup> has been attained.<sup>179</sup>
155. Those who have not practiced spiritual disciplines,<sup>180</sup> who have not acquired wealth in their youth,<sup>181</sup> pine away, like old herons in a lake without fish.
156. Those who have not practiced spiritual disciplines, who have not acquired wealth in their youth, lie like worn-out bows, sighing over the past. ■

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<sup>176</sup> The “house” is the body, the “house-builder” is craving. “Seeking, but not finding,” means failing to attain Enlightenment.

<sup>177</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>178</sup> The Fruit of Arahatsip.

<sup>179</sup> Verses 153 and 154 are the expressions (paeans) of the intense and sublime joy that the *Buddha* felt at the moment He attained Enlightenment. As such, they are replete with a wealth of sublime meaning and deep feeling. Here, the *Buddha* admits His past wanderings in cyclic existence, which thus proves His belief in rebirth. He was compelled to wander, and, consequently, to suffer as long as He could not find the builder of this house, the body. In His final birth, He discovered, by His own intuitive wisdom, the elusive builder residing not outside but within the recesses of His own mind. It was craving (*taṇhā*), or attachment, a self-creation, a mental element latent in all. The discovery of the builder is the eradication of craving by attaining Arahatsip. The rafters of this self-created house are the defilements (*kilesas*). The ridge-pole that supports the rafters is ignorance (*avijjā*). The destruction of the ridge-pole of ignorance by wisdom (*paññā*) results in the complete demolition of the house. With the demolition of the house, the mind attains the unconditioned, which is *nibbāna*.

<sup>180</sup> Those who have not lived the Holy Life.

<sup>181</sup> Not having acquired wealth at the time when it was possible to obtain it or to maintain the wealth that had been acquired.

## 12 • The Self<sup>182</sup> (Attavagga)

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157. If you hold yourself dear,<sup>183</sup> guard yourself diligently. Keep vigil (against evil) during one of the three watches of the night.<sup>184</sup>
158. One should first learn for oneself what is right; then only should one teach others. By wisely following this course of action, one will be beyond reproach.<sup>185</sup>
159. One should also do what one instructs others to do.<sup>186</sup> Before trying to train others, one should first train oneself. It is difficult to learn to train oneself.
160. You alone are your own refuge; who else could be? With yourself thoroughly controlled, you gain a refuge<sup>187</sup> very difficult to find.
161. The evil done by oneself, arising in oneself, and caused by oneself crushes those who lack wisdom, as a diamond crushes the rock from which it was formed.<sup>188</sup>
162. As a vine overpowers a tree, suffering overpowers those who do evil,<sup>189</sup> trapping them in a situation that only their enemies would wish them to be in.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> According to Buddhism, there is no permanent soul or unchanging entity (*atta*), either created by a god or emanating from a *paramātmān* “universal soul.” Here, the term *atta* “self” is applied by the *Buddha* to the whole body, or one’s personality or mind or life flux.

<sup>183</sup> That is, if one values oneself, if one values one’s own spiritual development.

<sup>184</sup> In ancient India, the night was divided into three watches. According to the Commentary, the “watches” in this context refer to the three stages of one’s life: (1) childhood; (2) youth; and (3) old age.

<sup>185</sup> Those who attempt to teach others without first having purified themselves, receive criticism (contempt, insults, blame, and the like) from others. On the other hand, those who attempt to teach others only after having purified themselves, receive praise from others and are, therefore, not subject to pain.

<sup>186</sup> One should practice what one preaches.

<sup>187</sup> The Fruit of Arahantship. It is with reference to Arahantship that it is said here that one gains a refuge that is difficult to find.

<sup>188</sup> The unwholesome deeds done by oneself, which originated in oneself, grinds into those who are lacking in wisdom; it grinds them in the four states of woe and destroys them, just as a diamond grinds into the rock-gem, which, too, is made of the very same material — it grinds into the very place out of which it originated, perforates it thoroughly, cuts it to bits, and makes it unsuitable for use.

<sup>189</sup> This refers to a lay person who, from birth, does (and keeps doing) one or more of the ten wrong actions or a monk who falls into grave lapses in discipline from the day of his higher ordination.

<sup>190</sup> The Pāḷi reads: *Yassa accantadussīyaṃ māluvā sālam iv’otataṃ karoti so tath’attānaṃ yathā naṃ icchaṃ diso*. A word-for-word translation would be: “Whose extreme unvirtue strangles him, as a *māluvā* creeper strangles a *sāla* tree, he does to himself, just as an enemy wishes him to do.”

163. It is easy to do things that are bad and unbeneficial to oneself, but it is extremely difficult, indeed, to do things that are beneficial and good.
164. Foolish people who scoff at the teachings of the wise, the noble, and the good, and who follow false doctrines<sup>191</sup> instead, bring about their own destruction, like the bamboo tree,<sup>192</sup> which dies after bearing fruit.
165. By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil not done; by oneself is one purified. Everyone has the choice to be pure or impure. No one can purify another.<sup>193</sup>
166. Do not neglect your own duty<sup>194</sup> for another, however great. Know your own duty and perform it. ■

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<sup>191</sup> *Diṭṭhi* (or *micchā-diṭṭhi*) “wrong views.” This would include any religious, philosophical, or political system that supports or promotes violence, ill will, or bigotry, in any form whatsoever, as well as any other corrupt, false, or evil doctrine (such as eternalism, nihilism, annihilationism, hedonism, etc.). In the first discourse of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, sixty-two types of wrong view concerning the world and the self taught by other teachers of the time are listed and described.

<sup>192</sup> *Kaṭṭhaka* tree.

<sup>193</sup> One can neither purify nor defile another.

<sup>194</sup> One’s own personal spiritual growth — the reference here is to the practice of insight meditation. One must not misunderstand this verse to mean that one should not selflessly work for the welfare of others. Selfless service is highly recommended by the *Buddha*.

## 13 • The World (*Lokavagga*)

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167. Do not pursue sense pleasures; do not be heedless; do not believe false doctrines; do not prolong the world.<sup>195</sup>
168. Do not be heedless in standing (at the door for alms); scrupulously observe this practice. One who observes proper practice<sup>196</sup> lives happily both in this world and the next.
169. Observe proper practice; do not observe improper practice.<sup>197</sup> One who observes proper practice lives happily both in this world and the next.<sup>198</sup>
170. Look on the world of aggregates as a bubble; look on it as a mirage.<sup>199</sup> Then, the King of Death will not find you.<sup>200</sup>
171. Come look at this world! Is it not like a painted royal chariot? The immature are immersed in this world of aggregates, but the wise are not attached to it.
172. When those who were formerly heedless become mindful, they give light to the world, like the full moon breaking free from behind the clouds.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Loka* “world” refers to the five aggregates of existence (*khandhas*), the continuity of which in the round of existences (*samsāra*) is prolonged by the pursuit of sense pleasures, by heedlessness, and by believing false doctrines.

<sup>196</sup> The Commentary states that proper practice (*dhammāṃ sucaritaṃ*) means stopping for alms at one house after another in the course of the alms-round except where it is not proper to go (such as the house of a prostitute).

<sup>197</sup> Improper practice (*na naṃ ducaritaṃ*) means not observing the rules listed in the preceding footnote.

<sup>198</sup> Shortly after His Enlightenment, the *Buddha* returned home to Kapilavatthu. On the day after His arrival, He went in quest of alms in the city. King Suddhodana, his father, hearing that his son was seeking alms in the city, anxiously ran up to Him and said that he was disgracing him by begging alms in the streets where He formerly used to travel in golden palanquins. Thereupon, the *Buddha* remarked that it was the custom of all His predecessors to go seeking alms door to door, and He uttered these verses (168 and 169).

<sup>199</sup> This psychophysical organism we call our “self” is to be regarded as a bubble, in the sense that it comes into being and breaks up (that is, it is impermanent), or as though it were a mirage or an illusion, that is, as empty and unreal. Those who see thus have put an end to the ills of life.

<sup>200</sup> The King of Death does not see those who perceive the world of aggregates (*khandhas*), and the like, as though it were a bubble or as though it were a mirage or an illusion.

<sup>201</sup> Those, spending their time in the comfort of the Path and Fruit, light up this world of aggregates, and so forth, with understanding obtained by the Paths, just as the full moon, breaking free from behind the clouds, lights up the world.

173. When their good deeds<sup>202</sup> overwhelm the bad ones that they have done, they give light to the world, like the moon breaking free from behind the clouds.
174. The people of this world are blind; in this world, only a few can see clearly (with Insight). Just as only a few birds are able to free themselves from a net, only a few find their way to the world of the gods<sup>203</sup> (and *nibbāna*).
175. Swans fly on the path of the sun; those with psychic powers fly through space;<sup>204</sup> the wise are led away from this world,<sup>205</sup> after conquering *Māra* and his train.<sup>206</sup>
176. Those who transgress the central law of life,<sup>207</sup> who speak falsely or scoff at the life to come, are capable of any evil.<sup>208</sup>
177. Misers<sup>209</sup> do not go to the celestial realms. Fools<sup>210</sup> do not praise generosity. The wise rejoice in generosity and so gain happiness in the life to come.
178. Better than ruling this world, better than going to the realm of the gods,<sup>211</sup> better than being lord of all the worlds<sup>212</sup> is one step taken on the path to *nibbāna*.<sup>213</sup> ■

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<sup>202</sup> Here, “good deeds” (*kusalena*) refers to the Path of Arahantship, the fourth and final Path Knowledge.

<sup>203</sup> *Sagga* “blissful states” — not places of eternal happiness.

<sup>204</sup> Through mental development, it is possible to fly through the air, walk on water, dive into the earth, etc. Such powers are psychic and supernormal, but they are not miraculous.

<sup>205</sup> That is, they realize *nibbāna*.

<sup>206</sup> The “train” or “host” of *Māra*, the Evil One, is described as ten kinds of passions: (1) sensory pleasures; (2) aversion for the Holy Life; (3) hunger and thirst; (4) craving; (5) sloth and torpor; (6) fear; (7) doubt; (8) distraction and obstinacy; (9) gain, praise, honor, and fame; and (10) extolling of oneself and the contempt of others.

<sup>207</sup> Truthfulness.

<sup>208</sup> An untruthful person, with no self-respect, who has no belief in an after-life and who has no fear for the attendant consequences of evil behavior, is liable to commit any evil. Such a person does not see earthly bliss or heavenly bliss or *nibbānic* bliss.

<sup>209</sup> Those hardened by stinginess.

<sup>210</sup> Those who know neither this world nor the world beyond.

<sup>211</sup> Internal purification is far superior to fleeting worldly possessions or transitory heavenly bliss.

<sup>212</sup> Better than the regal status of a “universal monarch.”

<sup>213</sup> *Sotāpatti*, attainment of the first stage that leads to *nibbāna*. Stream-Winners are not reborn in woeful states, but those who strive after wealth and power in this world are not exempt from them.



## 14 • The Awakened One (*Buddhavagga*)

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179. All moral defilements have been completely conquered in the Awakened One; no further moral defilements can arise in Him in this world.<sup>214</sup> By what track can you lead the *Buddha*, the Awakened One, whose wisdom is infinite, into your trap?<sup>215</sup>
180. The *Buddha*, the Awakened One, whose wisdom is infinite, who is free from the net of desires and the pollution of moral defilements and from all conditioning, by what track can you lead Him into your trap?
181. The wise who are established in meditation<sup>216</sup> take delight in the peace of liberation from sensory pleasures and moral defilements.<sup>217</sup> Such wise and mindful ones, who truly understand the Four Noble Truths, are cherished even by the gods.
182. It is hard to obtain human birth;<sup>218</sup> harder is the life of mortals;<sup>219</sup> harder still to get the opportunity to hear the true *Dhamma*. Rare is the appearance of a *Buddha*.
183. Avoid all evil, cultivate the good, purify your mind: this sums up the teaching of the *Buddhas*.
184. Cultivate patience and forbearance, and attain *nibbāna*, the highest goal of life, according to the Awakened Ones. A spiritual aspirant does not harm others; one who harms others is not a true spiritual aspirant.<sup>220</sup>
185. One should neither find fault with others<sup>221</sup> nor injure them.<sup>222</sup> Rather, one should live in accordance with the Fundamental Moral Code.<sup>223</sup> One should be moderate

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<sup>214</sup> Of sensory attachments, and so forth, there is not so much as a single defilement remaining of the mass of defilements He has conquered; the conquest is complete — the eradicated defilements can never arise in Him again.

<sup>215</sup> By what track, by what path, by what way, by what method can you lead the *Buddha* into your trap (into temptation)? This means that the *Buddha* cannot be lured by any temptation whatsoever.

<sup>216</sup> Those who are engaged in and are devoted to the two kinds of meditative absorption (*jhāna*), by turning to, attaining, staying in, emerging from, and retrospective analysis of them. The two kinds of meditative absorption are: (1) meditative absorption that is concerned with realizing the characteristics of phenomena (insight meditation) and (2) meditative absorption that is concerned with concentrating on objects.

<sup>217</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>218</sup> Rebirth as a human being is hard to come by due to the fact that it can only be obtained with great effort through plentiful moral wholesomeness.

<sup>219</sup> The life of mortals is hard, because it lasts only a short time. Moreover, one must be engaged in constant activity in order to sustain that life.

<sup>220</sup> *Samaṇa* — one who subdues one's passions; an ascetic.

in eating and sleeping, should dwell in a secluded place, and should devote oneself to higher concentration.<sup>224</sup> This sums up the teaching of the *Buddhas*.

- 186—187. Even a shower of gold cannot quench sense desire;<sup>225</sup> sense desire gives little pleasure and is fraught with evil consequences. Knowing this, the true disciples of the Fully Enlightened One find no delight even in celestial pleasures, but, instead, rejoice in the cessation of craving.
188. Driven by fear, people run for safety to mountains and forests, to sacred spots and shrines.
189. But none of these is a safe refuge, none is the highest refuge, because they cannot free one from suffering.
- 190—191. Take refuge<sup>226</sup> in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*, and, with full insight, you will grasp the Four Noble Truths: suffering; the cause of suffering; the end of suffering; and the Noble Eightfold Path that takes you beyond suffering.
192. This, indeed, is a safe refuge, the highest refuge. Having come to this refuge, one is liberated from all suffering.<sup>227</sup>
193. One like the *Buddha* is hard to find; such a one is not born everywhere. Wherever those established in wisdom are born, the community flourishes.
194. Blessed is the birth of the *Buddha*, blessed is the teaching of the *Dhamma*, blessed is the *Saṅgha*,<sup>228</sup> where all live in harmony.

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<sup>221</sup> One should neither find fault with others oneself nor cause others to find fault.

<sup>222</sup> One should neither inflict injury oneself nor cause others to inflict injury.

<sup>223</sup> *Pātimokkha* — the 227 disciplinary rules that every *Bhikkhu* is expected to observe.

<sup>224</sup> *Adhicitta* — the eight absorptions (*aṭṭhasamāpatti*): the four fine material absorptions (*rūpajjhāna*) and the four immaterial absorptions (*arūpajjhāna*). The absorptions are higher stages of mental concentration, which enable one to gain supernormal power.

<sup>225</sup> *Kāma* (also *kāmacchanda*) “sense desire.”

<sup>226</sup> One’s best refuge is oneself. A Buddhist seeks refuge in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha* as the Teacher, the Teaching, and the Taught in order to gain liberation (*vimokkha*). The *Buddha* is the supreme Teacher, who shows the way to liberation. The *Dhamma* is the Unique Way. The *Saṅgha* represents the Taught who have followed the Way and have become living examples. One formally becomes a Buddhist by seeking refuge in this Triple Gem (*Tisarāṇa*, “three-fold refuge”).

<sup>227</sup> All of the suffering of cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*).

<sup>228</sup> The *Saṅgha* is the world’s oldest historic celibate Order, founded by the *Buddha* some 2600 years ago. It is “democratic in constitution and communistic in distribution.” Strictly speaking, the Pāli word *Saṅgha* refers only to those noble disciples (*ariya*) who have realized the Four Paths and Four Fruits. The ordinary *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunīs* are merely their representatives. The Pāli word *parisā* is used to refer to the larger Buddhist community, including ordinary *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunīs* as well as lay followers.

195—196. When one pays homage to those who are worthy of homage — to the *Buddha* and His disciples, who have overcome obstacles<sup>229</sup> (to the development of insight) and have rid themselves of sorrow and lamentation —, the merit gained by such a person cannot be measured by anyone as “this much” or “that much.” ■

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<sup>229</sup> Such as craving, pride, and wrong view.



## 15 • Happiness (*Sukhavagga*)

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197. Ah, happily do we live, indeed, not hating anyone among those who hate. Among those who hate, we live without hating anyone.
198. Ah, happily do we live, indeed, never falling sick among those who are sick. We live without disease<sup>230</sup> even among those who are ill.<sup>231</sup>
199. Ah, happily do we live, indeed, never yearning for sense pleasures among those who yearn for them. We live without yearning even among those who yearn.
200. Ah, happily do we live, indeed, free from impurities.<sup>232</sup> We live in happiness, like the gods of the Radiant Realm.
201. Conquest breeds hatred, for the conquered live in sorrow. Those who are peaceful live happily, having renounced both conquest and defeat.
202. There is no fire like lust, no vice<sup>233</sup> like hatred, no sorrow like the burden of the aggregates, no happiness higher than the peace of *nibbāna*.
203. No disease is worse than hunger,<sup>234</sup> no suffering is worse than attachment to compound things.<sup>235</sup> Those who are wise, knowing these things as they really are, realize *nibbāna*, the highest happiness.
204. Health is the greatest gift, contentment is the greatest wealth,<sup>236</sup> the trustworthy are the best kinsmen,<sup>237</sup> *nibbāna* is the greatest happiness.

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<sup>230</sup> Free from moral defilements.

<sup>231</sup> Those who are afflicted with moral defilements.

<sup>232</sup> *Kiñcana*, literally, “something evil that sticks to one’s personality,” is a name for the three unwholesome roots (*mūla*): (1) greed (*lobha*); (2) hatred (*dosa*); and (3) delusion (*moha*).

<sup>233</sup> *Kali* “an unlucky throw at dice; bad luck, misery; bad quality.” Here, the reference is to “bad quality,” that is, “an evil or wicked habit or characteristic; a vice” — it is sometimes translated as “demerit” or “sin” (in the moral sense).

<sup>234</sup> Whereas other diseases are eliminated when medically treated, hunger (*jighacchā*) has to be “treated” constantly; hence, it is said to be more severe than all other diseases.

<sup>235</sup> Here, *saṃkhārā* “compound things” is used in the sense of the five aggregates: (1) corporeality (*rūpa*); (2) feelings (*vedanā*); (3) perception (*saññā*); (4) (predisposing) mental formations (*saṃkhārā*); and (5) consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

<sup>236</sup> To be content with what one has is a treasure greater than other riches.

<sup>237</sup> Whether related or not.

205. Having tasted solitude and the peace of *nibbāna*, those who drink in the joy of the essence of the *Dhamma* become free from fear and evil.
206. It is good to see the Noble Ones — it is always a pleasure to be in their company. It is also always a pleasure not to be in the company of the immature.
207. Those who associate with the immature grieve for a long time.<sup>238</sup> Keeping company with the immature is always painful — it is like going on a long journey with an enemy. The company of the wise is joyful, like being reunited with one's relatives.
208. Therefore, one should associate with the wise, who are virtuous,<sup>239</sup> dutiful,<sup>240</sup> noble,<sup>241</sup> learned,<sup>242</sup> and steadfast.<sup>243</sup> Keep company with them, as the moon moves among the stars. ■

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<sup>238</sup> Those who associate with the immature become like-minded and engage in unwholesome deeds which inevitably lead to states of woe. Hence, it is said that they “grieve for a long time.”

<sup>239</sup> Of high moral character; ethical.

<sup>240</sup> Regular in their practices.

<sup>241</sup> Those who are noble (*ariya*) are far removed from defilements.

<sup>242</sup> Endowed with textual learning and spiritual attainments.

<sup>243</sup> Resolute in their determination to attain the highest.

## 16 • Pleasures (*Piyavagga*)

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209. Do not run after sense pleasures and neglect the practice of meditation.<sup>244</sup> If you forsake the practice of morality, concentration, and insight and get caught up in the pleasures of the world,<sup>245</sup> you will come to envy those who put meditation first.<sup>246</sup>
210. Seeing those whom you hold dear brings pleasure, while not seeing them brings pain. Seeing those whom you do not hold dear brings pain, while not seeing them brings pleasure. Therefore, associate with neither, and go beyond both pleasure and pain.<sup>247</sup>
211. Therefore, do not get selfishly attached to anyone or anything, for separation from whomever or whatever you hold dear will bring you pain. There are no bonds for those who hold no person or thing dear or not dear.<sup>248</sup>
212. Endearment<sup>249</sup> brings grief; endearment brings fear. For those who are free from endearment, there is neither grief nor fear.
213. Affection<sup>250</sup> brings grief; affection brings fear. For those who are free from affection, there is neither grief nor fear.
214. Selfish attachment<sup>251</sup> brings grief; selfish attachment brings fear. For those who are free from selfish attachment, there is neither grief nor fear.
215. Lust<sup>252</sup> brings grief; lust brings fear. For those who are free from lust, there is neither grief nor fear.

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<sup>244</sup> That is, the practice of careful attention (*yoniso manasikāra*).

<sup>245</sup> That is, by frequenting places not befitting *Bhikkhus*.

<sup>246</sup> Separated from the monastic Order (*Saṅgha*) on account of such conduct and having returned to lay life, one comes to envy those who obtain the respect of both gods and humans by developing morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

<sup>247</sup> Applicable to both animate and inanimate objects (that is, to both persons and things).

<sup>248</sup> They to whom no person or thing is dear, the physical bond of attachment is discarded; they to whom no person or thing is not dear, the physical bond of aversion is discarded. These being discarded, other bonds are also as good as discarded. Hence, no person or thing should be held dear or not dear to oneself.

<sup>249</sup> Attachment to either persons or things held dear.

<sup>250</sup> The meaning is: on account of affection engendered in regard to sons, daughters, and so forth.

<sup>251</sup> Attachment to sense pleasures.

<sup>252</sup> Selfish desire (*kāma*) for objective sensuality (*vatthu*) and for subjective sensuality. Suffering arises on account of this twofold desire. “Objective sensuality” refers to the physical base, that is, the sensory objects, while “subjective sensuality” refers to sensuality considered as defilement (*kilesa*). The texts often

216. Craving<sup>253</sup> brings grief; craving brings fear. For those who are free from craving, there is neither grief nor fear.
217. Those who are endowed with virtue and insight,<sup>254</sup> who are established in the *Dhamma*,<sup>255</sup> who have realized the Truths,<sup>256</sup> and who fulfill their own duties,<sup>257</sup> win the respect of all the world.<sup>258</sup>
218. Those who have developed a desire to know the unconditioned,<sup>259</sup> whose minds are thrilled with a desire to reach that state,<sup>260</sup> and who are no longer attached to the sensory world,<sup>261</sup> are known as those who are “headed upstream.”<sup>262</sup>
- 219—220. As your family, friends, and well-wishers receive you with joy when you return home from a long journey, so will your good deeds receive you when you go from this life to the next, where they will be waiting for you with joy, like your kinsmen. ■

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stress the fact that what fetters mankind to the world of the senses are not the sense-organs nor the sense-objects but lustful desire (*chandarāga*).

<sup>253</sup> Here, “craving” (*taṇhā*) refers to selfish desire that arises at the six doors (*dvāra*); that is, craving for visible objects, for sounds, for smells, for tastes, for bodily impressions, and for mental impressions; in other words, it is craving for sensory stimulation. Craving is the source of suffering (*dukkha*) and of the ever-continuing cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*).

<sup>254</sup> Those endowed with the four virtues leading to purity and also with right insight, which is combined with Path and Fruit.

<sup>255</sup> That is, the nine supramundane states, namely, the Four Paths, the Four Fruits of holiness, and *nibbāna*.

<sup>256</sup> The Four Noble Truths are implied here.

<sup>257</sup> The three modes of training: (1) morality (*sīla*); (2) concentration (*samādhi*); and (3) wisdom (*paññā*).

<sup>258</sup> The world holds such as these dear and wants to see them, to honor them, and to make offerings to them.

<sup>259</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>260</sup> By being filled with thoughts pertaining to the first three Paths and Fruits.

<sup>261</sup> *Kāmaloka* “sensory world; the world of sensory pleasures.”

<sup>262</sup> *Uddhamsoto* “going upstream,” that is, those who are bound for the Pure Abodes (*Suddhāvāsa Brahma-loka*). The reference is to Non-Returners (*Anāgāmis*), who are reborn in the *Avihā Suddhāvāsa* and from there pass upwards until they reach the *Akaniṭṭha Suddhāvāsa*, the highest of the five Pure Abodes.



## 17 • Anger (*Kodhavagga*)

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221. Give up anger, give up pride,<sup>263</sup> and free yourself from worldly bondage.<sup>264</sup> No sorrow can befall those who do not cling to mind and body,<sup>265</sup> who are free from moral defilements, and who never try to possess people and things as their own.
222. One who holds back rising anger like a skillful charioteer checks a speeding chariot — that one I call a true charioteer. Other charioteers merely hold the reins.
223. Conquer those who are angry through loving-kindness, those who are evil through goodness, those who are greedy through generosity, and those who tell lies through truthfulness.<sup>266</sup>
224. One should speak only the truth, should not yield to anger, and should give freely when asked,<sup>267</sup> even if it is only a little. By means of these three things, one may go to the world of the gods.
225. Injuring no one, always self-controlled in their actions, those who are wise<sup>268</sup> go to the deathless state<sup>269</sup> beyond all sorrow.

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<sup>263</sup> *Māna* “pride, conceit, arrogance.”

<sup>264</sup> This refers to ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) which bind beings to cyclic existence: (1) personality belief (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) — the delusion of “selfhood”; (2) skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*); (3) attachment to rites and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*); (4) desire for gratification of the senses (*kāmarāga*); (5) ill will (*paṭigha*); (6) craving for fine-material existence (*rūparāga*); (7) craving for immaterial existence (*arūparāga*); (8) conceit (*māna*); (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*); and (10) ignorance (*avijjā*). The first five are regarded as “lower fetters,” the rest as “higher fetters.”

<sup>265</sup> *Nāma-rūpa* “name and form; mind and body; mentality and corporeality.” *Nāma-rūpa* is the fourth link in Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), where it is conditioned by consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and, for its part, is the condition of the six-fold sense base (*saḷāyatana*). Dependent Origination is the doctrine of the conditionality of all physical and mental phenomena. Together with the doctrine of the impersonality (*anattā*) of all physical and mental phenomena, Dependent Origination forms the indispensable condition for a real understanding and realization of the Teaching of the *Buddha*.

<sup>266</sup> Those who are prone to anger are to be won over by oneself being free from anger; those who are evil are to be won over by oneself being good; those who are excessively stingy are to be won over by oneself being generous with one’s own possessions; those who tell lies are to be won over by oneself being truthful. As stated in verse 5 above: “Returning hatred with hatred will never bring hatred to an end in this world; only by replacing hatred with love will hatred come to an end. This is an ancient and eternal law.”

<sup>267</sup> To a *Bhikkhu* who stands silently at the door seeking alms.

<sup>268</sup> *Arahats*.

<sup>269</sup> *Accuta* “changeless; deathless; everlasting; eternal,” that is, *Nibbāna*. It does not mean immortality.

226. For those who are vigilant, who train themselves day and night in the three modes of training,<sup>270</sup> and who strive continually for *nibbāna*, the moral defilements come to an end.
227. There is an old saying, Atula — it is not just of today: “People will blame you if you say too much; they will blame you if you say too little; they will blame you if you say just enough.” No one escapes blame in this world.
228. There never was, there never will be, nor is there now anyone who receives all praise or all blame.
- 229—230. Who would criticize those whom the wise praise day after day, knowing them to be truly faultless,<sup>271</sup> wise themselves, and endowed with knowledge and virtue? They shine like a coin of pure Jambonada gold.<sup>272</sup> Even the gods praise them, even Great Brahmā.
231. Guard yourself against bodily misconduct; control your body. Give up evil deeds, and cultivate good deeds.
232. Guard yourself against evil speech; control your tongue. Give up evil speech, and cultivate good speech.
233. Guard yourself against evil thoughts; control your mind. Give up evil thoughts, and cultivate good thoughts.
234. Those who are wise are disciplined in body, as well as in speech and in mind. They are well controlled indeed.<sup>273</sup> ■

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<sup>270</sup> The three modes of training: (1) morality (*sīla*); (2) concentration (*samādhi*); and (3) wisdom (*paññā*).

<sup>271</sup> Faultless in conduct; in morality.

<sup>272</sup> The Pāli reads: *Nikkham jambonadass’eva* and means “like a *nikkha* of Jambonada gold.” Jambonada gold comes from the Jambū River and is considered to be the finest gold. A *nikkha* can be a weight-unit of gold, an ornament, a ring, or a coin.

<sup>273</sup> Those who are wise are restrained in body, not resorting to violation of life, not causing harm, and so forth; restrained in speech, not resorting to false speech, vulgar speech, sarcasm, gossip, and idle chatter; and restrained in mind, not allowing covetousness, and so forth, to arise. In this world, they, indeed, are well guarded, well controlled; their “doors” (*dvāra*) are well closed. There are six “doors,” namely: (1) the eye door; (2) the ear door; (3) the nose door; (4) the tongue door; (5) the body door; and (6) the mind door. The term “doors” is used metaphorically in the *Abhidhamma* to denote the portals through which the mind interacts with the objective world. For more information, cf. *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*, Chapter 3, §§12—15.

## 18 • Impurities (*Malavagga*)

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235. You are now like a withered leaf; the messengers of death are near to you. You are about to go on a long journey,<sup>274</sup> but you are so unprepared.<sup>275</sup>
236. Make a lamp for yourself; strive on earnestly; be wise.<sup>276</sup> By removing impurities and freeing yourself from moral defilements, you shall live in the world of light.<sup>277</sup>
237. You are now well advanced in age, and you are in the presence of death. There is no place for you to stop along the way,<sup>278</sup> and you are so unprepared.
238. Make a lamp for yourself; strive on earnestly; be wise. By removing impurities and freeing yourself from moral defilements, you will no longer be subject to rebirth and old age.<sup>279</sup>
239. Little by little, instant by instant, remove your own impurities,<sup>280</sup> as a silversmith removes the dross from silver.
240. Just as rust corrodes the iron from which it is formed, evil deeds lead those who do them to a state of woe.
241. Non-recitation weakens the scriptures;<sup>281</sup> a house falls into ruin when not repaired; the body loses health when it is not exercised; the watchman fails when vigilance is lost.
242. Sexual misconduct is a taint in women; lack of generosity taints those who give. Bad qualities, indeed, are taints both in this world and the next.

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<sup>274</sup> “About to go on a long journey,” that is, you are standing face to face with death.

<sup>275</sup> You have not built up a store of merit for the next world.

<sup>276</sup> “Lamp” means a store of wholesome *kamma* to support you; “strive on earnestly” means to start quickly to accumulate wholesome *kamma*; and “be wise” means to perform wholesome deeds whenever you are able to do so, without waiting for the approach of death.

<sup>277</sup> *Suddhāvāsa* — the Pure Abode where *Anāgāmis* (Non-Returners) reside. The *Buddha* spoke this and the preceding verse to a dying old man, when his son performed a meritorious act in his name.

<sup>278</sup> Those who travel on a journey are able to stop for a rest along the way. Not so, however, for those going to the world beyond — it is not possible for those going to the next world to say to death, “Be patient for a few days while I do this or that.” As soon as one has left this world, one is reborn in the next.

<sup>279</sup> This refers to Arahantship.

<sup>280</sup> Moral defilements.

<sup>281</sup> Repetitious recitation of the scriptures is the key to committing them to memory. Non-recitation is the enemy of learning — through non-recitation, one gradually loses the ability to recall them without error.

243. But there is no taint worse than ignorance (of the Truth), the greatest taint. Remove this taint through wisdom, and you will be taintless.
244. Life is easy for one without shame and as bold as a crow, a mischief-maker who slanders others and is pretentious, aggressive, and corrupt.
245. Life is hard for one with a sense of shame, who is humble, gentle, contemplative, and detached, and who tries to live in purity.
246. Those who kill, lie, get drunk, take what is not given, or commit adultery dig their own graves, even in this very life.
247. Those who drink to intoxication are digging up their own roots.
248. Know this, dear fellow! Not restraining yourself brings evil in its wake. Do not let greed and ill will drag you into prolonged suffering.<sup>282</sup>
249. Some give out of faith, others out of devotion.<sup>283</sup> Do not envy others for the gifts they receive, or you will have no peace of mind<sup>284</sup> by day or night.
250. Those who have destroyed the roots of envy have peace of mind by day and night.
251. There is no fire like passion,<sup>285</sup> no grip like hate,<sup>286</sup> no net like delusion,<sup>287</sup> no river like craving.
252. It is easy to see the faults of others; we broadcast them, like winnowing chaff in the wind. It is hard to see our own faults; we hide them, as a crafty gambler hides a losing draw.
253. When one keeps dwelling on the faults of others and is always disparaging them, one's own moral intoxicants grow worse, making it harder to overcome them.<sup>288</sup>
254. There is no path in the sky;<sup>289</sup> outside the Teachings of the *Buddha*, there is no refuge.<sup>290</sup> All beings delight in fetters.<sup>291</sup> But the *Tathāgatas*<sup>292</sup> are free from them.

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<sup>282</sup> In states of woe.

<sup>283</sup> That is, they give only to those whom they admire among elders, novices, and others.

<sup>284</sup> That is, they are unable to achieve *samādhī* — mundane or supramundane concentration.

<sup>285</sup> Passion (*rāga*) burns internally without showing any external signs, such as smoke. *Rāga* may be translated as “lust; greed; excitement; passion.” It is synonymous with *lobha* “greed.”

<sup>286</sup> Seizure by a predator such as a python, a crocodile, a tiger, and so forth, grips a person only in a single existence, but seizure by ill will (*vyāpāda*) continues on and on, life after life after life.

<sup>287</sup> There is no net (or snare) comparable to delusion (*moha*) in that it binds and entangles one all around.

<sup>288</sup> To achieve the Fruit of Arahantship.

<sup>289</sup> There are no tracks, marks, or signs (such as footsteps) in the sky by which they can be traced. The reference is to *Arahats* and *Buddhas*.

255. There is no path in the sky; outside the Teachings of the *Buddha*, there is no refuge.  
All conditioned things are impermanent.<sup>293</sup> But the *Buddhas* are unperturbed.<sup>294</sup> ■

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<sup>290</sup> Outside of the dispensation (*sāsana*) of the *Buddha*, there are no recluses who are established in the Paths and Fruits.

<sup>291</sup> Such as craving, pride, wrong view, etc.

<sup>292</sup> Literally, “one who has thus come” or “one who has thus gone.” It is an epithet of the *Buddha*.

<sup>293</sup> Here, “conditioned things” (*samkhārā*) refers to the five aggregates, not one of which is eternal.

<sup>294</sup> By craving, pride, and wrong view, according to which they would see conditioned things as eternal.



## 19 • Established in *Dhamma* (*Dhammatṭhavagga*)

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256. Justice is ill-served when one passes judgment capriciously.<sup>295</sup> Those who are wise pass judgment after carefully considering both what is right and what is wrong.<sup>296</sup>
257. Those who do not pass judgment capriciously,<sup>297</sup> but, instead, in accordance with the law, safeguard the law. Thus, they are called “those who abide by the law.”<sup>298</sup>
258. One is not wise merely because one talks a good deal. Only those who are patient, who are free from hatred and fear, and who do no harm to others, are wise.
259. One is not versed in the *Dhamma* just because one talks about it. One is versed in the *Dhamma* who understands it and lives in harmony with it,<sup>299</sup> even if one has heard but a little.
260. Gray hair does not make an elder; one can grow old and still be a fool.
261. True elders<sup>300</sup> are those who comprehend the Four Noble Truths and the *Dhamma*, who are harmless and virtuous, and who restrain their senses and rid themselves of moral defilements.
262. Neither pleasant words nor good looks can make a person attractive who is jealous, selfish, or deceitful.
263. Only those who have uprooted such impurities from the mind are fit to be called “attractive.”
264. Shaving one’s head cannot make a recluse of one who is undisciplined<sup>301</sup> and tells lies. How can one who is driven by covetousness and greed be a true recluse?

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<sup>295</sup> *Sahasā* “hasty, inconsiderate,” “falsely or unfairly influenced by desire, hatred, fear, or ignorance;” the reference is to those who are biased.

<sup>296</sup> What is true and what is not true.

<sup>297</sup> That is, those who are impartial, fair-minded, unbiased.

<sup>298</sup> *Dhammatṭha* “standing in the law, abiding by the law, just, righteous.”

<sup>299</sup> By making strenuous effort to put into practice what little one knows, striving hard for penetrative realization.

<sup>300</sup> *Thera*, a term applied to *Bhikkhus* who have been in the Order for at least ten years from the date of their higher ordination.

<sup>301</sup> One who does not practice higher morality (*sīla*) and means of purification (*dhutaṅga*). The latter are strict observances recommended by the *Buddha* to monks as a way to cultivate contentment, renunciation,

265. One is a true recluse who has totally extinguished all evil, large and small.
266. Seeking alms<sup>302</sup> from others does not make one a *Bhikkhu*; nor does following a *Dhamma* that is foul<sup>303</sup> make one a *Bhikkhu*.
267. He is a true *Bhikkhu* who lays aside both good and evil, who leads a life of purity, and who passes through the world with detachment.<sup>304</sup>
- 268—269. Observing silence cannot make a sage of one who is dim-witted and ignorant. Like those who determine weight by holding a pair of scales, those who are wise determine what is good and what is evil — they accept the good<sup>305</sup> and reject the evil. For this reason, they are wise. They who also understand both worlds<sup>306</sup> are called “sages.”
270. Those who harm living beings are, for that reason, not Noble Ones; only those who do not harm living beings can rightly be called “Noble Ones.”<sup>307</sup>
- 271—272. Not by mere moral practice,<sup>308</sup> nor by acquiring much learning, nor by developing deep concentration, nor by dwelling in seclusion, nor by thinking to oneself “I enjoy the bliss of renunciation<sup>309</sup> not experienced by worldlings,” should the spiritual aspirant be content until full liberation<sup>310</sup> has been achieved. ■

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energy, and the like. One or more of them may be observed for a shorter or longer period of time. Thirteen such observances are enumerated in the *Visuddhimaga*, II.

<sup>302</sup> Strictly speaking, *Bhikkhus* do not beg. They stand silently at the door, accepting whatever is offered.

<sup>303</sup> A corrupt or heretical *Dhamma*. The Pāli term is *vissam*. *Vissam* has two meanings: “all, whole” and “foul smelling.” The Commentary gives only the latter meaning in this case.

<sup>304</sup> One who lives in the world of the five aggregates of clinging (*upādānakkhandha*) without being attached to them.

<sup>305</sup> *Varam* “the most excellent, the best, the good, the noble.” In this context, it refers to morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

<sup>306</sup> *Ubho loke*, literally, “both worlds” — the meaning here is internal and external aggregates, that is, one’s own aggregates as well as those of others.

<sup>307</sup> This verse was uttered by the *Buddha* to a fisherman named Ariya.

<sup>308</sup> The four kinds of higher morality (*sīla*) observed by *Bhikkhus* and the thirteen kinds of ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*).

<sup>309</sup> *Nekkhammasukham*: In this context, the reference is to *Anāgāmi* Fruition, the fruition that follows the attainment of *Anāgāmi Magga*.

<sup>310</sup> Arahatsip.



## 20 • The Path (*Maggavagga*)

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273. Of paths, the Eightfold<sup>311</sup> is the best; of truths, the Noble Four are best; of mental states, detachment<sup>312</sup> is the best; of human beings, the All-Seeing One<sup>313</sup> is the best.
274. This is the only path; there is no other that leads to the purification of vision.<sup>314</sup> Follow this path — it will bewilder *Māra*.<sup>315</sup>
275. This path will lead to the end of suffering. This is the path I made known after the arrows<sup>316</sup> of sorrow fell away.
276. All the effort must be made by you; the *Tathāgatas* can only show the way. Those who enter this path and practice meditation are freed from the bond of *Māra*.<sup>317</sup>
277. All compound things are impermanent; those who realize this through insight-wisdom<sup>318</sup> are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.<sup>319</sup>
278. All compound things have suffering as their nature; those who realize this through insight-wisdom are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.
279. All states are without self;<sup>320</sup> those who realize this through insight-wisdom are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.

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<sup>311</sup> The Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga*) consists of: (1) right understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*); (2) right thoughts (*sammā saṅkappa*); (3) right speech (*sammā vācā*); (4) right action (*sammā kammanta*); (5) right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*); (6) right effort (*sammā vāyāma*); (7) right mindfulness (*sammā sati*); and (8) right concentration of mind (*sammā samādhi*). This is the path taught by the *Buddha* for liberation from the round of existences (*saṁsāra*).

<sup>312</sup> *Virāga* “detachment,” that is, *nibbāna*.

<sup>313</sup> *Cakkhumā* “All-Seeing One” (from *cakkhu* “eye”), an epithet of the *Buddha*.

<sup>314</sup> This path alone, which the *Buddha* called “the best,” is there for purifying “the vision of Path and Fruit.”

<sup>315</sup> This path, indeed, will confuse *Māra*, that is, it will trick him away.

<sup>316</sup> This path is the drawing out or removal of all “arrows,” such as desire for the gratification of the senses (sense desire), etc. This is the path made known by the *Buddha*, having understood it Himself by way of self-realization.

<sup>317</sup> Those who enter the path taught by the *Tathāgatas* and who practice the two kinds of meditation (calm abiding [*samatha*] and insight meditation [*vipassanā*]), are released from the bond of *Māra* known as “the whirl of the three planes of existence.”

<sup>318</sup> *Paññā* is translated here as “insight-wisdom” (*vipassanā paññā*).

<sup>319</sup> That is, to the purification of the mind.

<sup>320</sup> Impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and soullessness (*anattā*) are the three characteristics of all things conditioned by causes (*saṁkhārā*). It is by contemplating these three characteristics that one realizes *nibbāna*. A meditator may concentrate on any characteristic that appeals to him or her most.

280. Those who are indolent, who do not put forth the effort when they are young and strong, and who have a weak will and a divided mind, will never attain Path Insight, which can only be perceived by wisdom.
281. Be guarded in speech, well-controlled in mind, and do no evil through your body.<sup>321</sup> Purify these three, and choose the path that leads to wisdom.<sup>322</sup>
282. Meditation brings wisdom; lack of meditation leaves ignorance. Knowing well this twofold path of gain and loss of wisdom, choose the path that leads to wisdom.
283. Cut down the forest of mental and moral defilements — not real trees.<sup>323</sup> The forest of mental and moral defilements breeds danger.<sup>324</sup> Therefore, cut down this forest, including the undergrowth,<sup>325</sup> O *Bhikkhus*, and be free of craving.
284. So long as the desire of man towards women<sup>326</sup> is not cut down and the slightest trace of it remains, that is how long one's mind is in bondage, as the calf is bound to its mother.
285. Cut off<sup>327</sup> selfish desire, as one would pluck an autumn lotus with the hand. Follow the path to *nibbāna* expounded by one<sup>328</sup> who knows the way.
286. "I will make this my winter home, have another house for the monsoon season, and dwell in a third during the summer." Lost in such fantasies, the immature forget the danger that awaits them.<sup>329</sup>

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*Anattā*, that is, soullessness, selflessness, or essencelessness, is the crux of Buddhism. The term *samkhāra* "compound," which is applied to any conditioned thing, is used in the two previous verses (nos. 277 and 278), while, in the third verse (no. 279), the term *dhamma* is used in order to show that everything, including the unconditioned *nibbāna*, is without self existence. *Nibbāna* is not included in *samkhāra*. It is neither transitory nor sorrowful. *Dhamma* embraces both the conditioned and the unconditioned. *Nibbāna* is, and it is essenceless.

<sup>321</sup> Be "watchful in speech" by avoiding the four kinds of verbal misconduct; "well-controlled in mind" by not allowing thoughts of covetousness, etc., to arise; "do no evil through your body" by not taking life, etc.

<sup>322</sup> Thus purifying the three modes of action, one should choose the eightfold path taught by the *Buddhas*.

<sup>323</sup> When the *Buddha* said, "cut down the forest," some newly-ordained *Bhikkhus* thought He meant cutting down real trees. The *Buddha* corrected their misunderstanding by uttering these words.

<sup>324</sup> Of rebirth.

<sup>325</sup> Here, the large trees are called *vana* "forest," and the small ones are called *vanatha* "undergrowth." In the same way, the bigger defilements (that is, those that drag one into future existences) are called *vana*, while the small ones (that is, those that produce ill effects in this life) are called *vanatha*.

<sup>326</sup> Any kind of sexual desire regardless of what the object is of one's desire.

<sup>327</sup> Cut off selfish desire by means of the Path of Arahatsip.

<sup>328</sup> The *Buddha*.

<sup>329</sup> The approach of death.

287. Death carries away a man who is absorbed in his family and his possessions<sup>330</sup> and whose mind longs for and is attached to sense pleasures, as the monsoon flood sweeps away a sleeping village.

288—289. Neither children nor parents nor relatives can rescue one whom death has seized. Indeed, neither kith nor kin can give protection. Remembering this, those who are wise, who are restrained by morality, should quickly clear the obstacles to the path<sup>331</sup> that leads to *nibbāna*. ■

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<sup>330</sup> A man who, having obtained children and domestic animals (herds of cattle), is absorbed in these things, thinking: “My sons are attractive, strong, learned, and competent in all functions. My oxen are beautiful, healthy, and capable of driving heavy loads. My cows yield much milk.”

<sup>331</sup> The Noble Eightfold Path.



## 21 • Varied Verses

### (*Pakiṇṇavagga*)

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290. If, by giving up a lesser happiness, one may behold a greater one,<sup>332</sup> let those who are wise give up the lesser to gain the greater.
291. Those who seek their own happiness by inflicting pain on others, being themselves entangled by the bonds of hatred, cannot be free from hatred.<sup>333</sup>
292. Do not leave undone what ought to be done,<sup>334</sup> and do not do what ought not to be done.<sup>335</sup> In such conceited and heedless ones, the burden of suffering will only grow heavier.
293. In those mindful and contemplative ones who practice “mindfulness of the body” meditation, who always do what ought to be done<sup>336</sup> and never do what ought not to be done,<sup>337</sup> suffering will come to an end.
294. Having slain mother craving, father self-conceit, and the two warrior kings,<sup>338</sup> and having destroyed the kingdom,<sup>339</sup> along with its revenue collector,<sup>340</sup> ungrieving<sup>341</sup> fares the *brāhmaṇa*.<sup>342</sup>
295. Having slain mother craving, father self-conceit, and the two warrior kings, and having destroyed the five hindrances, the fifth of which is perilous, like a journey along a tiger-infested path,<sup>343</sup> ungrieving fares the *brāhmaṇa*.

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<sup>332</sup> *Vipulam sukham*: according to the Commentary, “the greater one” refers to the bliss of *nibbāna*.

<sup>333</sup> Such as these, indeed, on account of that hatred, constantly come to grief.

<sup>334</sup> For a *Bhikkhu*, “what ought to be done” includes the observance of moral precepts, living in a forest, maintenance of ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*), steadfastness in meditation (*bhāvanā*), etc. In other words, it includes the kinds of tasks that are the proper function of a *Bhikkhu* from the time of “going forth.”

<sup>335</sup> For a *Bhikkhu*, “what ought not to be done” includes decorating umbrellas, shoes and sandals, bowls and beakers, water-pots, waistbands, and shoulder straps, etc. These are not the proper tasks of a *Bhikkhu*.

<sup>336</sup> Those who are constant practitioners, who scrupulously observe the moral precepts, who unceasingly act with diligence to the task to be done, etc.

<sup>337</sup> They never do what is improper.

<sup>338</sup> The two *Khattiya* kings. This refers to the two views of eternalism and annihilationism.

<sup>339</sup> “The kingdom” refers the sense-doors and sense-objects.

<sup>340</sup> “The revenue collector” refers to attachment.

<sup>341</sup> The meaning here is that the one in whom the cankers (*āsava*s) have been extinguished goes without suffering, because the four cankers (desire for gratification of the senses; desire for eternal existence; wrong views; and ignorance) have been destroyed by the sword (*asi*) of the Path of Arahatsip.

<sup>342</sup> An *Arahat*.

296. The disciples of Gotama are wide awake and vigilant, with their thoughts focused on the *Buddha* day and night.
297. The disciples of Gotama are wide awake and vigilant, with their thoughts focused on the *Dhamma* day and night.
298. The disciples of Gotama are wide awake and vigilant, with their thoughts focused on the *Saṅgha* day and night.
299. The disciples of Gotama are wide awake and vigilant, with their thoughts focused on mindfulness of the body<sup>344</sup> day and night.
300. The disciples of Gotama are wide awake and vigilant, delighting in harmlessness<sup>345</sup> day and night.
301. The disciples of Gotama are wide awake and vigilant, delighting in meditation<sup>346</sup> day and night.
302. It is hard to leave the world;<sup>347</sup> it is hard to live the life of a *Bhikkhu*. It is painful to stay in the world;<sup>348</sup> it is painful to have to be in the company of those of an uneven temperament.<sup>349</sup> Those who wander in cyclic existence are trapped in suffering. Therefore, do not be one who wanders in cyclic existence; do not be one who is trapped in suffering.
303. Those who are full of confidence<sup>350</sup> and pure in conduct, possessed of good repute and wealth,<sup>351</sup> are honored wherever they go.
304. The good shine like the Himalayas, whose peaks glisten above the rest of the world even when seen from afar. The wicked pass unseen, like an arrow shot at night.

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<sup>343</sup> *Veyyagghapañcamam* — this term is used to denote the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), of which skeptical doubt or indecisiveness is the fifth. A dangerous and perilous path which is infested with tigers is called *veyyaggha*. Skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) or indecisiveness is comparable to such a path.

<sup>344</sup> The mindfulness arising on account of the contemplation of the thirty-two component parts of the body, the ten cemetery contemplations, the analysis of the four elements, or the contemplation of the fine-material sphere, such as the internal blue *kaṣiṇa*, and so forth.

<sup>345</sup> Delighting in the meditation on compassion (*karuṇā*).

<sup>346</sup> Specifically, the meditation on loving-kindness (*mettā*).

<sup>347</sup> It is difficult to leave the world and go forth into the homeless life of a *Bhikkhu*. It is difficult to abandon one's wealth, one's possessions, one's home, one's occupation, one's friends, one's family, one's relatives, and so on, and go forth into the homeless life.

<sup>348</sup> The life of a householder is also difficult. The obligations associated with the household life are also difficult to fulfill and a source of suffering.

<sup>349</sup> An "uneven temperament" refers to those who are argumentative and ill-tempered.

<sup>350</sup> *Saddhā*, trustful confidence based on knowledge. Blind faith is discouraged in Buddhism.

<sup>351</sup> "Fame" such as the "lay fame" of householders like Anāthapiṇḍika, and others. Wealth is twofold: (1) grains and so forth and (2) the sevenfold "noble wealth."

305. Those who sit alone,<sup>352</sup> sleep alone,<sup>353</sup> go about alone, who are unwearied, and who  
vanquish the ego by themselves alone<sup>354</sup> will find delight in a forest grove.<sup>355</sup> ■

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<sup>352</sup> Those who maintain proper posture and steadfast attention on the meditation topic even though they may be in the midst of a thousand *Bhikkhus* are said to be “sitting alone.”

<sup>353</sup> Those who lie down on their right side with unfaltering mindfulness and with attention focused on the meditation topic are said to be “sleeping alone.”

<sup>354</sup> The meaning here is: disciplining oneself, all by oneself, by means of attaining the Paths and Fruit, having duly engaged in concentration on a meditation topic, at the places of resting at night, and so forth.

<sup>355</sup> The meaning here is: thus disciplining oneself, one would take delight in a forest grove, which is secluded from the sounds of men and women and so forth, for it is not possible for one to be so disciplined when living a crowded life.





## 22 • The Downward Course

### (*Nirayavagga*)<sup>356</sup>

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306. Those who say what is not true (about others),<sup>357</sup> those who do evil and then deny what they have done, both choose the downward course. After death, they become equals in the netherworld.<sup>358</sup>
307. Those who put on the saffron robe but remain ill-mannered and undisciplined in thought, word, and deed are dragged downward by their evil deeds.<sup>359</sup>
308. It is better for a monk who is without morality and undisciplined in thought, word, and deed to swallow a red-hot ball of iron than to eat the alms-food offered by the devout.
309. Four misfortunes befall those who, unmindful of right conduct, commit adultery: loss of merit, loss of sleep, condemnation, and rebirth in a state of woe.
310. On this downward course, what pleasure can there be for the frightened man lying in the arms of his frightened lover, both going in fear of punishment? Therefore, do not commit adultery.
311. As a blade of *kusa* grass<sup>360</sup> can cut the finger when it is wrongly held, asceticism carelessly practiced<sup>361</sup> can send one on the downward course.
312. An act carelessly performed, a vow not kept, conduct unbefitting a *Bhikkhu* — these things bring little reward.
313. If anything is worth doing, do it well; do it firmly and energetically. Half-hearted ascetics merely cover themselves with more and more dust (of moral defilements).

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<sup>356</sup> *Niraya* refers to a state of woe, a place of punishment and torture, where evil *kamma* is worked out. It is usually translated as “purgatory” or “hell.” Here, it is translated as “the downward course” (*duggati*), since the verses in this chapter mostly discuss courses of action that lead downward to a state of woe and to avoid being confused with concepts of Purgatory or Hell in other religions. According to Buddhism, rebirth in a state of woe is not eternal.

<sup>357</sup> Those who, without having actually seen any fault in another, tell lies and accuse another falsely.

<sup>358</sup> Those who say what is not true and those who deny what they have done, having gone to the world beyond, become equal so far as their destination is concerned, both going to a state of woe.

<sup>359</sup> That is, they will be reborn in a state of woe.

<sup>360</sup> Here, *kusa* (Sanskrit *kuśa*) refers to any type of grass with a sharp blade. In Hinduism, it refers to the sacred grass used in certain religious ceremonies.

<sup>361</sup> Due to broken moral precepts, and so forth.

314. It is better to refrain from evil deeds; evil deeds torment those who perform them later on. It is better to perform good deeds, which will not lead to sorrow.
315. Guard yourself well, both within and without,<sup>362</sup> like a well-defended fort. Do not waste a moment, for wasted moments send you on a downward course.
316. Those who are ashamed of what is not shameful,<sup>363</sup> who are not ashamed of what is shameful,<sup>364</sup> and who hold wrong views<sup>365</sup> are headed on a downward course.
317. Those who see danger in what is not dangerous, who do not see danger in what is dangerous,<sup>366</sup> and who hold wrong views are on a downward course.
318. Those who see wrong where there is none,<sup>367</sup> who do not see wrong where there is,<sup>368</sup> and who hold wrong views are on a downward course.
319. But those who see wrong where there is wrong, who see no wrong where there is none, and who hold right views are on an upward course. ■

<sup>362</sup> This means to guard both the internal and the external senses. The six internal senses (sense bases) are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; the six external senses (sense objects) are visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and thoughts or ideas.

<sup>363</sup> *Bhikkhus*, for example, should not be ashamed of their begging bowls.

<sup>364</sup> One should be ashamed of having one's private parts exposed in public, for example.

<sup>365</sup> Those who believe what is contrary to reality, contrary to the truth, contrary to the facts. Wrong or evil views (*diṭṭhi* or *micchādiṭṭhi*) are condemned by the *Buddha*, inasmuch as they are a source of wrong and evil aspirations and conduct and lead a person to woe and suffering.

The wrong view that has, everywhere and at all times, most misled and deluded humanity is ego-delusion or personality belief. Personality belief (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) is of two kinds: (1) eternity belief and (2) annihilation belief. The belief in an *ātman* or soul usually goes hand-in-hand with the belief in the Creator God of theistic religions, who is considered to be the first, most perfect, and most powerful of the "souls." Buddhism utterly rejects the concept of a Creator God — a "first cause" — as being "impossible."

Another listing of wrong beliefs includes the following: (1) there is no such virtue as generosity — this means that there is no good effect in giving alms; (2) there is no such virtue as liberal alms giving; (3) there is no such virtue as offering gifts to friends — here, too, the implied meaning is that there is no effect in such charitable actions; (4) there is neither fruit nor result of good or evil actions; (5) there is no such belief as "this world"; (6) there is no such belief as "a world beyond"; (7) there is no mother — that is, there is no effect in anything done to her; (8) there is no father — that is, there is no effect in anything done to him; (9) there are no beings who die and are being reborn; (10) there are no righteous and well-disciplined recluses and *brāhmaṇas* who, having realized by their own super-intellect this world and the world beyond, make known the same — the reference here is to *Buddhas* and *Arahats*.

In the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (the first discourse of the *Dīgha-Nikāya*), sixty-two false views are listed and described, comprising all conceivable wrong views and speculations about humanity and the world.

The so-called "evil views with fixed destiny" (*niyata-micchādiṭṭhi*) include: (1) the fatalistic view of the uncausedness of existence (*ahetukadiṭṭhi*); (2) the view of the inefficacy of action (*kiriya-diṭṭhi*); and (3) nihilism (*natthikadiṭṭhi*).

<sup>366</sup> Sources of danger include: desire for gratification of the senses (sense desire), ill will, confusion, self-estimation (arrogance, conceit, etc.), speculative opinions, moral defilements, misconduct, and so forth.

<sup>367</sup> *Avajja* — this refers to the ten kinds of right belief.

<sup>368</sup> *Vajja* — this refers to the ten kinds of wrong belief.

## 23 • The Elephant (*Nāgavagga*)

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320. Patiently, I shall bear harsh words directed at me, as an elephant bears arrows shot from a bow on the battlefield. Alas, most people are undisciplined.<sup>369</sup>
321. Only the trained (horses and elephants) are taken to gatherings of people; the king mounts only the trained (horse or elephant). Best among men are those who have trained the mind to endure harsh words patiently.
322. Mules, thoroughbred horses, horses from Sindh, and great elephants are good animals when they are trained. But even better are those with well-trained minds.
323. Indeed, no means of transport<sup>370</sup> can take one to the place where one has never been before;<sup>371</sup> only those with a well-trained mind<sup>372</sup> can go to this untrodden land.
324. When in must and difficult to control, the elephant named *Dhanapālaka*, being held in captivity against his will, will not eat so much as a morsel;<sup>373</sup> he yearns to return to his forest home.<sup>374</sup>
325. Those who are dim-witted, who eat too much, who sleep too much, who are lazy, and who wallow about like an overfed hog, are born again and again.
326. Long ago, my mind used to wander as it liked and do what it wanted. Now, I can control my mind, as a mahout controls an elephant with his goad.
327. Delight in vigilance; guard your mind well.<sup>375</sup> Raise yourself out of the mire of moral defilements, as an elephant raises itself out of the mud.
328. If you find friends who are virtuous, wise, and loyal, joyfully and mindfully walk with them and overcome all dangers.

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<sup>369</sup> The majority of people, being undisciplined in morality, speak without thinking and create conflict.

<sup>370</sup> Such as elephants and horses.

<sup>371</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>372</sup> Those who, having first controlled the senses, have later developed Path Insight.

<sup>373</sup> When in heat, elephants are by nature fierce and difficult to control. The elephant *Dhanapālaka* was exceptionally fierce.

<sup>374</sup> The story associated with this verse is that of a captive elephant named *Dhanapālaka* who had been caring for its parents in the forest.

<sup>375</sup> Against negative thoughts.

329. If you cannot find friends who are virtuous, wise, and loyal, walk on alone, like a king who relinquishes his kingdom<sup>376</sup> or an elephant roaming at will in the forest.
330. It is better to be alone than to associate with those lacking wisdom. Be contented, turn away from evil, and walk alone, like an elephant roaming in the forest.
331. It is good to have friends when the need arises; good to be content with whatever is available. Good deeds<sup>377</sup> are friends at the time of death. But best of all is going beyond sorrow.<sup>378</sup>
332. In this world, it is good to attend to the needs of one's mother; good to attend to the needs of one's father; good to attend to the needs of *samanas*.<sup>379</sup> But best of all is to attend to the needs of *brāhmaṇas*.<sup>380</sup>
333. It is good to live in virtue till old age; good to have unshakable faith; good to attain the highest wisdom; good to do no evil. Joy will be yours always. ■

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<sup>376</sup> Who abdicates the throne and becomes a recluse by “going forth” into homelessness.

<sup>377</sup> Merit.

<sup>378</sup> *Dukkha*.

<sup>379</sup> Ascetics.

<sup>380</sup> *Buddhas* and *Arahats*.

## 24 • Craving (*Taṇhāvagga*)

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334. The compulsive urges<sup>381</sup> of those who live heedlessly<sup>382</sup> grow like a creeper. They jump from one life to another, like a monkey looking for fruit in the forest.
335. In this world, when one is overwhelmed by this vile craving that tenaciously clings to the senses, sorrow spreads like wild grass.
336. In this world, sorrow falls away from the life of one who has overcome this vile craving — so hard to get rid of —, as drops of water fall away from a lotus leaf.
337. Therefore, I say to all of you assembled here, dig up craving root and all, as you would uproot *bīraṇa* grass.<sup>383</sup> Do not allow *Māra* to crush you again and again, as a stream crushes reeds on its banks.
338. As a tree, though cut down, recovers and grows again if its roots are not destroyed, suffering<sup>384</sup> will come to you again and again if these compulsive urges are not rooted out.
339. Those who hold wrong views,<sup>385</sup> in whom the thirty-six streams (of craving) that flow<sup>386</sup> toward pleasurable objects are strong, are swept away by the currents of their deluded thoughts connected with passion.
340. The currents of craving flow towards all sense objects. The creepers of craving arise (at the six sense doors) and fix themselves (on the six sense objects). Whenever you see these creepers of craving growing in your mind, uproot them with wisdom.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> That is, craving. Craving is threefold: (1) craving for sense-pleasures; (2) craving for birth in a world of separateness; and (3) craving for existence to end. Craving for personal sense fields, such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and for external sense objects such as forms, sounds, scents, tastes, contact, and mind objects, when viewed in terms of these three aspects, divides itself into thirty-six varieties.

<sup>382</sup> Those who live a life that is heedless, with heedlessness characterized by slackened awareness, develop neither meditative absorption, nor insight, nor path and fruit.

<sup>383</sup> A type of wild grass known for its fragrance.

<sup>384</sup> *Dukkha* — of birth, ageing, and death.

<sup>385</sup> Those whose views are debased due to defective understanding.

<sup>386</sup> Through the six sense doors.

<sup>387</sup> Path Insight.

341. In all human beings, sense pleasures arise that are drenched with craving. All are attached to sense pleasures; all seek happiness. Hankering after such pleasures, they are caught in the cycle of birth and death.
342. Those driven by craving are terrified, like a hare caught in a trap; held fast by fetters and bonds,<sup>388</sup> they undergo suffering<sup>389</sup> again and again, for a very long time.
343. Those driven by craving are terrified, like a hare caught in a trap. Therefore, those who wish to free themselves should overcome this craving.<sup>390</sup>
344. Even though he left the forest of desire for the household life and entered the grove of the life of a *Bhikkhu*, he rushed recklessly back to that very forest. Behold that man! Though free,<sup>391</sup> he ran back into bondage.<sup>392</sup>
345. Fetters of wood, rope, or even iron, say the wise, are not as strong as selfish attachment to wealth and family.<sup>393</sup>
346. Such fetters drag us down (to lower planes of existence) and are hard to break.<sup>394</sup> Break them by overcoming selfish desires, and turn from the world of sensory pleasure without a backward glance.
347. A person driven by fierce cravings is like a spider caught in its own web. Break out of the web, and turn away from the world of sensory pleasure and sorrow.
348. If you want to reach the farther shore of existence,<sup>395</sup> give up what is before,<sup>396</sup> behind,<sup>397</sup> and in between.<sup>398</sup> Set your mind free from everything,<sup>399</sup> and go beyond birth and death.

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<sup>388</sup> There are five kinds of bonds (*saṅga*): lust (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), pride (*māna*), and false views (*diṭṭhi*).

<sup>389</sup> In repeated rebirths.

<sup>390</sup> Because beings are surrounded and entwined by craving, those who are striving for *nibbāna* should dispel that craving by means of the Path of Arahantship.

<sup>391</sup> From desire for the household life.

<sup>392</sup> This verse was uttered about a young man who, through faith, entered the Order, but later, tempted by sensory pleasures, returned to the household life.

<sup>393</sup> Longing for the things of this world, such as jewels, ornaments, children, spouses, etc.

<sup>394</sup> The bondage of defilements, once arisen due to greed, is hard to break.

<sup>395</sup> When this is so — having gone to the farther shore (*bhavassa pāragū*) of the whole threefold existence (that is, the past, the present, the future), by way of higher knowledge, full understanding, relinquishment, meditational development and realization, living with mind liberated in regard to the totality of conditioned existence with its divisions such as aggregates (*khandhas*), elements (*dhātus*), and spheres (*āyatanas*) —, one does not come again by birth, decay, and death. That is the meaning.

<sup>396</sup> Let go of attachment, longing, clinging, desiring, (mental) possession, obsession, grasping, craving — with reference to the aggregates (*khandhas*) of the past.

<sup>397</sup> Let go of attachment and so forth with reference to the aggregates of the future.

<sup>398</sup> Let go of attachment and so forth with reference to the aggregates of the present.

349. In those who are disturbed by deluded thoughts, whose passions are strong, and who see only what is pleasurable, craving grows more and more. Indeed, they only keep strengthening their fetters.
350. One who takes delight in calming thoughts, who is ever mindful, who meditates on the loathsomeness (of the body)<sup>400</sup> will get rid of craving. Such a one will break the bonds of *Māra*.
351. Those who have reached their goal,<sup>401</sup> who are free from fear, craving, and moral defilements, have cut off the thorns of existence.<sup>402</sup> This body is their last.<sup>403</sup>
352. One who is free from craving and attachment, who understands the deeper meaning of what is written,<sup>404</sup> is rightly called “bearer of the final body,” “one of great wisdom,” “a great being.”
353. I have conquered myself and live in purity. I know all that there is to be known.<sup>405</sup> I have left everything behind and live in freedom. Having comprehended the Four Noble Truths by myself, to whom shall I point as my teacher?<sup>406</sup>
354. There is no gift better than the gift of the *Dhamma*, no gift more sweet, no gift more joyful. It puts an end to cravings<sup>407</sup> and the sorrow they bring.
355. Wealth harms those who are greedy but not those who seek the other shore.<sup>408</sup> By their caving for wealth, the greedy harm themselves and those around them.
356. Greed ruins the mind, just as weeds ruin fields. Therefore, honor those who are free from greed.
357. Hatred<sup>409</sup> ruins the mind, just as weeds ruin fields. Therefore, honor those who are free from hatred.

<sup>399</sup> All conditioned existence.

<sup>400</sup> The purpose of this meditation is to get rid of attachment to this so-called “body.”

<sup>401</sup> *Arahats*. Arahatship is the final goal of those who have gone forth in the monastic Order.

<sup>402</sup> Here, “thorns” refers to the three unwholesome roots (*mūla*): (1) greed (*lobha*); (2) hatred (*dosa*); and (3) delusion (*moha*). They have cut off the “thorns” that lead to continued existence.

<sup>403</sup> That is, this is their final existence.

<sup>404</sup> One who is skilled in the four kinds of analytical knowledge: (1) meaning (*attha*); (2) text (*dhamma*); (3) etymology (*nirutti*); and (4) understanding (*paṭibhāna*).

<sup>405</sup> Attained Arahantship.

<sup>406</sup> The *Buddha* gave this answer to Upaka, a wandering ascetic, who questioned Him about His teacher. Even though the *Buddha* had teachers before His Enlightenment, He had none for His Enlightenment.

<sup>407</sup> The eradication of craving leads to the cessation of the aggregates, which means the end of rebirths.

<sup>408</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>409</sup> Hatred, ill will, aversion, etc.

358. Ignorance ruins the mind, just as weeds ruin fields. Therefore, honor those who are free from ignorance.
359. Selfish desire<sup>410</sup> ruins the mind, just as weeds ruin fields. Therefore, honor those who are free from selfish desire. ■

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<sup>410</sup> Covetousness.



## 25 • The *Bhikkhu*<sup>411</sup> (*Bhikkhuvagga*)

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360. Restrain your eyes and ears; restrain your nose and tongue. The senses are good friends when they are restrained.
361. Restrain your body in deeds; restrain your tongue in words; restrain your mind in thoughts. Good is restraint in everything.<sup>412</sup> Those restrained in everything are freed from all sorrow.<sup>413</sup>
362. He is a true *Bhikkhu* who has trained his hands, feet, and speech to serve others. He meditates deeply, is at peace with himself, and lives alone.
363. He is a true *Bhikkhu* who is restrained in speech, who speaks softly, who is modest, and who explains the *Dhamma* in sweet words.<sup>414</sup>
364. He is a true *Bhikkhu* who follows the *Dhamma*, meditates on the *Dhamma*, delights in the *Dhamma*, and, therefore, never falls away from the *Dhamma*.
365. He is a true *Bhikkhu* who is content with what he receives and is never jealous of others. Those who are jealous cannot do well in meditation.<sup>415</sup>
366. Even the gods praise the *Bhikkhu* who is contented with whatever he has and who lives a pure life of selfless service.
367. Free from the desire to possess people and things,<sup>416</sup> a *Bhikkhu* does not grieve over what is not.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> *Bhikkhu* is exclusively a Buddhist term. “Mendicant Monk” may suggested as the best rendering in English for *Bhikkhu*. Here, the term is left untranslated. The female counterpart is *Bhikkhunī*, usually translated as “Nun.”

<sup>412</sup> *Sabbattha*, “in every way; in every sense.”

<sup>413</sup> Freed from suffering (*dukkha*); freed from cyclic existence (*samsāra*).

<sup>414</sup> Who speaks in moderation, who is not boastful, and who patiently explains the meaning of the *Dhamma*.

<sup>415</sup> *Samādhi*, both mundane and supramundane concentration.

<sup>416</sup> One who has no sense of “I” or “mine” and no attachment to any part of “name-and-form” (*nāma-rūpa*), that is, all the varied aspects of the human personality, occurring as the five aggregates of existence (*pañcakkhandha*) — also known as the “five aggregates of clinging.” The five aggregates consist of: (1) material form or corporeality (*rūpakkhandha*); (2) feeling (*vedanākkhandha*); (3) perception (*saññākkhandha*); (4) (predisposing) mental formations (*samkhārakkhandha*); and (5) consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*). What is called “individual existence” is, in reality, nothing but a mere process of those mental and physical phenomena (that is, the five aggregates of existence), a process that has been going on since immemorial time and that will also continue after death for an immemorial period of time. These five

368. With loving-kindness toward all<sup>418</sup> and with confidence<sup>419</sup> in the *Buddha's* Teachings, a *Bhikkhu* will reach the holy state where all is peace.<sup>420</sup>
369. *Bhikkhu*, bail out<sup>421</sup> your boat! When it is bailed out, it will go faster.<sup>422</sup> Cast out greed and hatred, and reach *nibbāna*.
370. Cut off the five lower fetters,<sup>423</sup> cut off the five higher fetters,<sup>424</sup> cultivate the five faculties,<sup>425</sup> and you will cross the river of life.
371. Meditate, *Bhikkhu*, meditate!<sup>426</sup> Do not be heedless! Do not run after sense pleasures! Do not swallow a red-hot iron ball<sup>427</sup> and then cry, “I am in great pain!”
372. There can be no concentration in those who lack wisdom, and no wisdom in those who lack concentration. Those in whom there is both wisdom and concentration are, indeed, close to *nibbāna*.<sup>428</sup>

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aggregates, taken either singly or collectively, do not constitute a self-dependent real ego-entity, self (*attā*), soul, or personality, nor is there to be found any such entity apart from them.

<sup>417</sup> He does not grieve, is not tormented, when that “name-and-form” comes to decay and degeneration, but, instead, dispassionately perceives thus: “What has decayed in me is, by its very nature, subject to decay and to degeneration — this is simply the way it is.”

<sup>418</sup> One who has exerted oneself in loving-kindness (*mettā*) as a subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*) as well as one who has attained the third (according to the *suttanta* method) or fourth (according to the *Abhidhamma* method) stage of meditative absorptions (*jhānas*) by developing loving-kindness. With this practice, one extends unconditional loving-kindness to “whatever living beings there may be, without exception, whether weak or strong; long, large, or middling; short, subtle or gross; visible or invisible; living near or far; born or coming to birth” (*Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* — Discourse on Loving-Kindness).

<sup>419</sup> He is pleased with the *Buddha's* Teachings. Indeed, he takes great delight in, relishes, rejoices in being pleased with the *Buddha's* Teachings.

<sup>420</sup> The stilling of all conditioned things — the Tranquil, the Unconditioned, the Blissful, in short, *nibbāna*.

<sup>421</sup> Bail out the ship of personality of the water of wrong thoughts — throw that water away.

<sup>422</sup> Just as a ship on the ocean, heavy with water that has seeped in through a hole, is able to reach a harbor quickly, without sinking, after the crew has closed up its fissures and emptied it of water, in the same way, when, by means of restraint, one closes up the fissures of sense outlets such as the eye, this ship of one's personality, filled with the water of wrong thoughts, will go quickly to *nibbāna* without sinking in the whirl of *saṃsāra*, after it has been emptied of the water of the wrong thoughts that had arisen.

<sup>423</sup> Cut off, through the Paths of Stream-Entry (*Sotāpatti-magga*), Once-Return (*Sakadāgāmi-magga*), and Non-Return (*Anāgāmi-magga*), the five lower fetters (*saṃyojana*) that lead one to states of woe. The five lower fetters are: (1) personality belief; (2) skeptical doubt; (3) attachment to wrongful rites and rituals; (4) sense-desire; and (5) hatred.

<sup>424</sup> Abandon, relinquish, indeed, cutoff, through the Path of Arahantship (*Arahatta-magga*), the five higher (more subtle) fetters that lead one to the celestial worlds above. The five higher fetters are: (6) attachment to the form realm; (7) attachment to the formless realms; (8) conceit; (9) restlessness; and (10) ignorance.

<sup>425</sup> The five faculties are: (1) faith or confidence (*saddhā*); (2) mindfulness (*sati*); (3) effort (*virīya*); (4) concentration (*samādhi*); and (5) wisdom (*paññā*).

<sup>426</sup> By the two kinds of meditative absorptions: (1) fine-material absorption and (2) immaterial absorption.

<sup>427</sup> For those who are heedless and relinquish mindfulness (*sati*), it is as if they have swallowed a metal ball heated in hell. One should not swallow a metal ball by being heedless. Such heedlessness will only lead to a state of woe.

373. The *Bhikkhu* who goes to a secluded place to meditate, whose mind is calm, who clearly perceives the *Dhamma*,<sup>429</sup> experiences a joy that transcends that of ordinary people.
374. Whenever he reflects on the rise and fall of the aggregates that make up the body, he experiences joy and happiness. To the wise, that is the way to the deathless.
375. For a wise *Bhikkhu* in this Teaching, this is the beginning of the practice leading to *nibbāna*: train your senses, be contented, strictly observe the fundamental moral code,<sup>430</sup> and keep pure and noble friends.
376. Be a friend to all. Perform your duties well.<sup>431</sup> Then, with your joy ever growing, you will put an end to sorrow.
377. As the jasmine creeper sheds the withered flowers that blossomed the previous day, so should you, O *Bhikkhu*, shed blemishes such as attachment to sensory pleasures and to hatred.
378. A *Bhikkhu* who is calm in body,<sup>432</sup> speech,<sup>433</sup> and mind,<sup>434</sup> who is well-composed, and who has turned his back on worldly pleasures,<sup>435</sup> is called a “peaceful one.”
379. Raise yourself by your own efforts, O *Bhikkhu*; be your own critic. Thus, self-reliant and vigilant, you will live in joy.
380. Be your own master, guide, and protector. Be your own refuge. Train your mind, as merchants train their noble horses.<sup>436</sup>
381. Full of peace and joy is the *Bhikkhu* who follows the *Dhamma* and reaches the other shore beyond the flux of mortal life.<sup>437</sup>

<sup>428</sup> Those who do not meditate cannot develop insight. However, those in whom both meditative absorption and insight are developed understand and see reality as it is. Those in whom both of these exist are close to *nibbāna*.

<sup>429</sup> Who gains insight into the *Dhamma* by understanding cause and condition.

<sup>430</sup> The *Pātimokkha* — the code of conduct consisting of 227 disciplinary rules followed by *Bhikkhus* in the Theravādin tradition.

<sup>431</sup> What is referred to here is virtuous conduct as well as skillful performance of due rites and rituals.

<sup>432</sup> Due to the absence of violence to life, and so on, in one’s actions.

<sup>433</sup> Due to the absence of false speech, vulgar speech, sarcasm, gossip, and idle chatter.

<sup>434</sup> Due to the absence of craving, and so on, in one’s thoughts.

<sup>435</sup> Literally, “who has vomited worldly pleasures.” Here, “vomited” means “given up.”

<sup>436</sup> Ever mindful, one should restrain oneself, guard oneself, train oneself, protect oneself, by preventing unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising, by abandoning unwholesome mental states that have already arisen, by developing wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen, and by maintaining and perfecting wholesome mental states that have already arisen.

<sup>437</sup> Reaches *nibbāna* — the tranquil, the unconditioned, the blissful.

382. Though young in years, a *Bhikkhu* who devotes himself to the *Dhamma* lights up the world, as the moon lights a cloudless sky. ■

## 26 • The *Brāhmaṇa*<sup>438</sup> (*Brāhmaṇavagga*)

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383. O *brāhmaṇa*, cut off the stream of craving with diligence, and abandon sense desires. Go beyond the world of conditionality, and know the deathless ground of life.<sup>439</sup>
384. Those *brāhmaṇas* who are well established in the two types of meditation<sup>440</sup> will go beyond likes and dislikes, and all their fetters will fall away.
385. Who is a true *brāhmaṇa*? That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is attached neither to the nether shore<sup>441</sup> nor to the farther shore,<sup>442</sup> and who is free from moral defilements.
386. Who is a true *brāhmaṇa*? That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who dwells in seclusion, practicing both calm abiding and insight meditation, who is free from moral defilements, and who has reached the supreme goal of life.<sup>443</sup>
387. The sun shines in the day; the moon shines in the night. The warrior shines in battle; the *brāhmaṇa* shines in meditation. But, day and night, the *Buddha* shines<sup>444</sup> in radiance of love for all.
388. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who has shed all evil. I call that one a recluse whose mind is serene — a wanderer, whose heart is pure.
389. One should never harm a *brāhmaṇa*. A *brāhmaṇa* should never become angry and should never cause harm to others even when harmed by them.
390. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who does not retaliate. When the intention to harm others is brought to an end, suffering will wane.

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<sup>438</sup> In this chapter, the term *brāhmaṇa* is used instead of *Brahmin*. The term “*Brahmin*” refers to a member of the priestly caste, while “*brāhmaṇa*” refers to a person who lives a pure, sinless, and ascetic life, which is what is meant here. In the literature, the term *brāhmaṇa* is often used as a synonym for *Arahat* (as in verses 294 and 295 above).

<sup>439</sup> The unconditioned, *nibbāna*.

<sup>440</sup> Calm abiding or tranquility meditation (*samatha*) and insight or analytical meditation (*vipassanā*).

<sup>441</sup> That is, the sense bases.

<sup>442</sup> That is, the sense objects.

<sup>443</sup> *Arahatship*.

<sup>444</sup> The *Buddha* outshines immorality by the power of morality, vice by the power of virtue, ignorance by the power of wisdom, demerit by the power of merit, unrighteousness by the power of righteousness.

391. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who does not hurt others with unkind acts, words, or thoughts, and who is restrained in these three aspects.
392. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who learns the *Dhamma* of the Fully Enlightened One and who respectfully pays homage to the Holy One, as a *Brahmin* pays homage to the sacrificial fire.
393. It is not matted hair, nor family background,<sup>445</sup> nor caste that makes a *brāhmaṇa*. Only those who have realized the Truth<sup>446</sup> and the *Dhamma*<sup>447</sup> can rightly be called *brāhmaṇas*. They are the pure ones.
394. What use is matted hair, O foolish one? What use is a deerskin on which to sit for meditation if your mind still seethes with lust?
395. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is content with ragged robes gathered from a dust heap, who is lean, with veins standing out,<sup>448</sup> and who meditates alone in the forest.
396. I do not call one a *brāhmaṇa* just because one is born from the womb of a high caste mother. One is merely a “*bho*-sayer”<sup>449</sup> if one is not free from moral defilements. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is free from moral defilements and selfish attachments.
397. The true *brāhmaṇa* has thrown off all fetters<sup>450</sup> and does not tremble in fear.<sup>451</sup> No selfish bonds can ensnare such a one,<sup>452</sup> no impure thoughts pollute the mind.
398. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who has cut through the strap (of ill will), the thong (of craving), and the chain (of wrong views together with latent defilements), and who has lifted the bar that fastens the door (of ignorance). Such a one has gotten up from sleep and is fully awake.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> *Gotta* “ancestry, lineage, clan.”

<sup>446</sup> The realization of the Four Noble Truths.

<sup>447</sup> Here, *Dhamma* refers to the nine supramundane states, namely, the four Paths, the four Fruits, and *nibbāna*.

<sup>448</sup> *Bhikkhus* who wear rags for robes, who are thin and lean (literally, “of little flesh and blood”), and whose veins are visible from following a rigorous practice that befits them.

<sup>449</sup> “*Bho*” is a familiar form of address, which even the *Buddha* uses when addressing lay people. The meaning here is that such a one merely knows proper etiquette in greeting others.

<sup>450</sup> The ten fetters (*samyojana*) which bind beings to cyclic existence (*samsāra*): (1) personality belief — the delusion of selfhood; (2) skeptical doubt; (3) attachment to rites and rituals; (4) desire for gratification of the senses; (5) ill will; (6) craving for fine-material existence; (7) craving for immaterial existence; (8) conceit; (9) restlessness; and (10) ignorance.

<sup>451</sup> Due to craving.

<sup>452</sup> Who has transcended attachments and gone beyond the passions, and so forth.

<sup>453</sup> Who is awakened from having realized the Four Noble Truths (*Ariya-sacca*): (1) suffering (*dukkha*); (2) the origin (*samudaya*) of suffering; (3) the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering; and (4) the path or way (*magga*) leading to the cessation of suffering, namely, the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya-aṭṭhangika-magga*).

399. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who endures abuse, beating, and imprisonment without anger.<sup>454</sup> Such a one has the power of patience no army can defeat.<sup>455</sup>
400. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is free from anger, who practices austerity,<sup>456</sup> who is virtuous and free from craving, and who controls the senses. This body is the last.<sup>457</sup>
401. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who does not cling to sensory pleasure, just as water does not cling to a lotus leaf or a mustard seed to the tip of a needle.
402. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who, even in this life, realizes the end of suffering,<sup>458</sup> who has laid down the burden,<sup>459</sup> and who is free from moral defilements.
403. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* whose wisdom is profound and whose understanding deep, who knows the right path from the wrong path, and who has reached the highest goal.<sup>460</sup>
404. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* whose wants are few, who is detached from sensory desire, and who associates with neither householders nor homeless mendicants.<sup>461</sup>
405. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who has put aside weapons and renounced violence toward all creatures, the perturbed<sup>462</sup> as well as the unperturbed.<sup>463</sup> Such a one neither kills nor helps others to kill.<sup>464</sup>
406. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is never hostile to those who are hostile toward him, who is detached<sup>465</sup> among those who are selfish,<sup>466</sup> and who is at peace<sup>467</sup> among those who have taken up weapons.

<sup>454</sup> One who bears, without anger, the abuse that is heaped upon one through the ten ways of abusing, assault with hands, weapons, and so forth, and even being bound with fetters, and so forth.

<sup>455</sup> Who has the strength of an army due to being endowed with the power of patience, which has been reinforced by its springing up again and again.

<sup>456</sup> *Dhutaṅga*, ascetic or austere purification practices recommended to monks by the *Buddha* as a means to cultivate contentment, renunciation, energy, detachment, moderation, etc.

<sup>457</sup> Who is in the final body, because the present life is at the termination of cyclic existence (*samsāra*).

<sup>458</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>459</sup> Who has laid down the burden of the *khandhas*, the five aggregates of clinging.

<sup>460</sup> Arahatsip.

<sup>461</sup> Who is not contaminated by either lay persons or homeless ones.

<sup>462</sup> Those who are not engaged in spiritual practices, whose minds are restless and senses undisciplined.

<sup>463</sup> Those whose minds are calm and senses controlled — *Arahats*.

<sup>464</sup> One who has laid down arms in regard to all sentient beings, by virtue of hatred having been destroyed, and who never kills any living thing oneself, or who never helps others to kill.

<sup>465</sup> Who is free of grasping at “I,” “me,” or “mine.”

<sup>466</sup> Those who grasp at a sense of self.

<sup>467</sup> Due to having laid aside the use of force.

407. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* from whom passion and hatred, along with arrogance and deceit, have fallen away, like a mustard seed that has fallen from the point of a needle.
408. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who speaks gentle, instructive,<sup>468</sup> and true words, and who does not offend anyone by his speech.
409. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who, here in this world, takes nothing that is not given, whether long or short, small or great, pleasant or unpleasant.
410. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who has no desire either for anything of this world or for anything of the next, and who is free from craving and moral defilements.
411. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is free from craving, who, through knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, is free from doubt, and who has realized the deathless.<sup>469</sup>
412. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who, in this world, has gone beyond good and evil,<sup>470</sup> who is free from sorrow, and who, being free from the taints of moral defilements, is pure.
413. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is pure,<sup>471</sup> clear,<sup>472</sup> serene,<sup>473</sup> and unagitated,<sup>474</sup> and in whom craving for existence has come to an end. Such a one shines like the moon in a cloudless sky.
414. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who, having crossed the dangerous swamp (of passion), the difficult road (of moral defilements), the ocean of life,<sup>475</sup> the darkness of ignorance,<sup>476</sup> and the fourfold flood,<sup>477</sup> has reached the other shore. Such a one practices both calm abiding and insight meditation, is free from craving and doubt, clings to nothing, and remains in perfect peace.
415. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who, in this world, has given up attachment to sense pleasures and who, having left the life of a householder, has become a *Bhikkhu*. Such a one has eradicated sense desires and has come to the end of existence.

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<sup>468</sup> Causing others to understand what is right, proper, virtuous, wholesome, true, etc.

<sup>469</sup> *Nibbāna*.

<sup>470</sup> Who has discarded both wholesome and unwholesome states of mind.

<sup>471</sup> Free of moral impurities.

<sup>472</sup> Stainless.

<sup>473</sup> Of calm mind.

<sup>474</sup> Free of defilements — in whom there is not the agitation of defilements.

<sup>475</sup> *Samsāra*.

<sup>476</sup> “Ignorance” means not having realized the Four Noble Truths.

<sup>477</sup> *Ogha*, “flood” refers here to the *āsava*s, “cankers.” The four *āsava*s are: (1) the canker of sense desire (*kāmāsava*); (2) the canker of desiring eternal existence (*bhavāsava*); (3) the canker of wrong views (*diṭṭhāsava*); and (4) the canker of ignorance (*avijjāsava*).



416. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who, in this world, has given up craving and who, having left the life of a householder, has become a *Bhikkhu*. Such a one has eradicated craving and has come to the end of existence.
417. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who has given up attachment to the sense pleasures of human life, who has transcended attachment to the sense pleasures of celestial life, and who is completely free from attachment.
418. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who no longer takes delight in sense pleasures but, rather, takes delight in solitude. Such a one has attained perfect peace, is free from moral defilements, has overcome the five aggregates of existence, and is diligent.
419. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who knows the passing away and rebirth of beings, in every detail, who is detached, who is well-gone,<sup>478</sup> and who is enlightened.<sup>479</sup>
420. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* whose destination no one can know. Such a one has eradicated moral defilements and is an *Arahat*.
421. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who does not cling to the aggregates of the past, future, and present and who is free from moral defilements and attachment.
422. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who is fearless like a bull, who is noble and diligent, who strives for high moral virtues, who has conquered *Māra*, who is free from craving, who has been cleansed of moral defilements, and who knows the Four Noble Truths.
423. That one I call a *brāhmaṇa* who knows past existences, who sees both the celestial and the lower worlds, who has reached the end of rebirths, and who, with Path Insight, has become an *Arahat* — one who has accomplished all that had to be accomplished for the eradication of moral defilements. ■

<sup>478</sup> *Sugata*, gone to *nibbāna*.

<sup>479</sup> Due to understanding the Four Noble Truths.